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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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Monday 2 November 2015

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House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

NEW WRIT

Ordered,

That the Speaker do issue his Warrant to the Clerk of the Crown to make out a new Writ for the electing of a Member to serve in the present Parliament for the Borough Constituency of Oldham West and Royton, in the room of the Right Honourable Michael Hugh Meacher, deceased.—*(Ms Winterton.)*

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Pension Advice

1. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): What estimate he has made of the number of pensioners accessing up-to-date pension advice from his Department. [901922]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Shailesh Vara): The Department itself does not give advice. Regulated financial advice can be given only by a Financial Conduct Authority-authorised adviser. Pension Wise, set up by the Government, offers free, impartial guidance to people aged over 50 with defined contribution pensions. So far, over 20,000 people have received a guidance appointment since April 2015.

John Mann: Twenty thousand is a drop in the ocean, considering the enormity of the changes. How will the Government ensure that pensioners are getting good, sound advice—and quantify that they are—in order that pensioners are not ripped off by people advising them badly and therefore lose out in future years?

Mr Vara: May I bring the hon. Gentleman into the 21st century? There have been over 1.5 million visits to the Pension Wise website. We are confident we will make sure that the public are aware of what Pension Wise has to say, and that people can access the website or have face-to-face, telephone or online interviews.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I am getting a growing number of inquiries from women in their early 60s who seem to be unaware of the changes to the retirement age. I am worried that these ladies have not been contacted by the relevant Department and seem to be unaware that their retirement date will be rather later than they had imagined. What can be done to help them?

Mr Vara: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. May I put on the record the facts and circumstances? Between April 2009 and March 2011, the Department proactively mailed all women born between 6 April 1950 and 5 April 1953, informing them of their state pension age under the Pensions Act 1995. Following the 2011 changes, the Department wrote to all individuals directly affected to inform them of the change to their state pension age. Sending mail to those individuals, who are due to reach state pension age between 2016 and 2026, was completed between January 2012 and November 2013.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Ministers will be aware of the recent Work and Pensions Committee report, which contained stark warnings about pension scams since the advent of pensions freedoms and about the risk of people being conned out of their life savings. I am sure that Ministers are also aware of the recent survey showing that one in seven over-55s—about 1 million people—have been targeted by pension scams since April, when the pensions freedoms were introduced. Will the Minister reassure the House that he takes the Work and Pensions Committee report and the findings of the survey very seriously, and will he outline what the Government intend to do to protect people from fraudsters?

Mr Vara: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we do take this issue very seriously. That is why we set up Pension Wise. Let me make it absolutely clear: the Government are not complacent about scams. We are making sure that the public are aware of how to detect a scam, how to deal with it and how to report it. The two regulators are also working with us. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman will find that the Pension Wise website and those giving guidance do advise people on how to deal with scams.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I was about to ask the same question as the Minister just answered. May I take this opportunity to say to him that a large number of my constituents are being badly affected by scams, particularly over the internet? This is a matter of great concern. I am delighted that the Government have taken such strides to deal with it.

Mr Speaker: As I have often had cause to observe, repetition in the House of Commons Chamber is not a novel phenomenon.

Mr Vara: I refer to my previous answer.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): As it is one of the best places in the UK to retire, many people in Torbay welcome the freedoms that are being created, but they do need to be protected from scams, as has been mentioned. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that pensioners can access the advice they need before making a crucial decision about their future?

Mr Vara: Pension Wise is there to give impartial and free advice. When necessary, it will direct people towards professional advisers. The Money Advice Service has on its books a directory of some 2,300 firms throughout the country. In Scotland, there are 162 firms. The total number of advisers is more than 6,000. We are trying to make sure that the public have proper access whenever advice is required.

Benefit Sanctions

2. **Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): If he will make an assessment of the potential effect of benefit sanctions on claimants' mental health. [901923]

7. **Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): If he will make an assessment of the potential effect of benefit sanctions on claimants' mental health. [901929]

15. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): If he will make an assessment of the potential effect of benefit sanctions on claimants' mental health. [901937]

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): Many factors affect an individual's mental health. To assess the effect of sanctions in isolation of all other factors would be misleading. A number of checks are built into the system to support all claimants, including those with mental health concerns.

Callum McCaig: That answer is disappointing. Opposition Members are concerned about the terrible damage that the ideological cuts being made by the Government are doing to the most vulnerable in our society. For the last two weeks at Prime Minister's questions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) has asked the Prime Minister about suicides following benefit reductions. Will the Minister publish the details of the investigations forthwith?

Priti Patel: The Department carries out reviews to identify whether any lessons can be learned. I should emphasise that the Information Commissioner has considered this issue and upheld the Department's decision not to publish the details because of the level of personal information they contain. For that reason, it would be unlawful to release this information.

Joanna Cherry: In 2014, the Scottish Association for Mental Health, Scotland's leading mental health charity, published research that found that 98% of its service users said that their mental health had deteriorated as a direct result of welfare reform. Further research this year by the same charity at the facility it runs in my constituency at Redhall walled garden confirmed that benefit sanctions had been detrimental to the mental health of service users there. What steps will the Government take to address the adverse effects of benefit sanctions on those with mental health problems?

Priti Patel: Sanctions play an important part in the labour market by encouraging and supporting people to go back to work. Jobcentre Plus staff are trained to support claimants with mental health conditions during their job search and such individuals have access to more expert advice, should it be needed.

Gavin Newlands: Is the Minister aware that her disastrous and failing sanctions regime is not only causing untold misery to the people who are sanctioned, impacting on their wellbeing and mental health, but having a devastating impact on their families? A recent Citizens Advice Scotland report highlighted the fact that children are indirectly punished by sanctions. In the light of those alarming findings, will she reassess the impact of sanctions on the wellbeing of the family? Do they pass the Prime Minister's family test?

Priti Patel: Our sanctions system is robust and there is clear evidence that it works. The hon. Gentleman mentions support for the family. It is this Government who are supporting the family through our new life chances measure and, importantly, ensuring that work pays, which is how families get out of poverty and how the life chances of children and families improve.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that the number of cases that result in sanctions is falling? Does that not show that jobcentre staff are working with claimants to help them engage with their search for employment, and that most people who are unemployed want to work?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is right. Jobseeker's allowance sanctions have decreased by more than 40% over the last year. Importantly, the principle behind the sanctions system is that it helps individual jobseekers to comply with the reasonable requirements that they develop and agree in discussion with their work coaches to help them prepare for and move into work.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): People with mental health problems face particular barriers in getting them back into the labour market and productive work. Does the Minister agree that the Government should take all steps necessary to make sure that people with mental health problems are not sanctioned unnecessarily and that we show flexibility in making sure that they get back into the labour market?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend raises some fundamental points. Our staff are trained not only to support claimants with mental health conditions during their job search but, importantly, to provide more expert advice and support should they need it. To return to my earlier point, claimants are asked to meet only reasonable requirements, taking into account their circumstances and capabilities and, of course, their mental health conditions.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I welcome the Department's recent decision to trial a yellow card system for 14 days for those being sanctioned in various places. I also welcome the Department's decision to place advisers at several food banks, to trial whether that would also help with some of the benefits transition problems. When does my right hon. Friend expect the Department to have enough evidence to share with us the outcomes of the trials?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is right: the trials are important and are bringing together more support and advice for individual claimants. I would expect to see more information and details of the trials early in the new year.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): May I also thank the Government for accepting the "Feeding Britain" report's call for a yellow card system? Before they report to the House on a good warning system for people about the impact of sanctions coming down the road, they will need to begin the trials. Is there any chance of the Minister being able to tell us when the trials will begin and when they will be completed?

Priti Patel: I thank the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee for his question. We are working out the details and I would be very happy to discuss with him the details of when we will roll out the trials quite shortly.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): The so-called yellow card pilot scheme is an admission by the Government that the sanctions regime is not working and that, in particular, it is badly failing people with serious mental illnesses. Why are the Government waiting until next year to introduce the pilot scheme? In the meantime, will they please just stop sanctioning people who are seriously ill?

Priti Patel: I respectfully disagree with the hon. Lady. Claimants are asked to meet only reasonable requirements, taking into account their circumstances. As the pilots get under way, I think she will find that this is about how we can integrate support for claimants and, importantly, provide them with the support and guidance to help them get back to work.

Dr Whiteford: I listened carefully to the Minister's response, but the reality is that people with mental health problems are being disproportionately sanctioned, and that has been evident for some time. Why will the Government not listen to voices across the House, including those on the Work and Pensions Committee, and subject the sanctions regime to a full independent review?

Priti Patel: I would make a few points to the hon. Lady. For a start, the Government have been listening and we have responded to the Work and Pensions Committee, which is why we will be trialling and piloting the new scheme. I reiterate my earlier comment: our staff are trained to support claimants with mental health conditions and there is no evidence to suggest that such claimants are being sanctioned more than anybody else. We provide the support through our jobcentres and our claimants are asked to meet only reasonable requirements.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): The Minister may have inadvertently slipped up there. There is clear evidence from last year that 58%—more than half—of people with mental health conditions on the employment and support allowance work-related activity group were sanctioned. That is equivalent to 105,000 people. According to a Mind survey, 83% say that their health condition was made worse as a result. The Government's own evaluation of their Work programme has shown not only how ineffective it is, with 8% of people with mental health conditions getting into sustained work, but that their punitive sanctions regime just does not work, so why will the Government not commit to undertaking an independent review of sanctions?

Priti Patel: Labour has clearly now changed its policy on sanctions, which of course it used to support. The sanctions system is kept under constant review, and we are trialling an early-warning system, as recommended by the Work and Pensions Committee. I would have thought she welcomed that. Sanctions play an important part in the labour market by supporting people, particularly those with health conditions, into work. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members have conveniently forgotten that ESA sanctions and ESA were put in place by a Labour Government. The sanctions system is clear, fair and effective in promoting positive behaviours to help claimants back into work.

Private Sector Pensions

3. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of auto-enrolment on private sector pension saving. [901924]

18. **Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of auto-enrolment on private sector pension saving. [901940]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Shailesh Vara): Since the gradual introduction of automatic enrolment began in 2012, participation in workplace pension saving in the private sector has increased by 21 percentage points, from 42%, or 5.9 million workers, in 2012, to 63%, or 9.2 million workers, in 2014.

Henry Smith: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating B&CE, based in my constituency, on so expertly rolling out its people's pension, an important provision for workers across the country?

Mr Vara: I am happy to congratulate B&CE on its people's pension product and the work it does. It is important that the roll-out of automatic enrolment receives as much support as possible so that people can make choices that are right for them. I also commend my hon. Friend for his excellent work, which was evident when I visited his constituency.

Pauline Latham: On 4 December, I will hold my second workplace pensions event in my constituency. Does my hon. Friend agree that small businesses need to advise their employees about the pension changes, and what efforts are his Department making to ensure they do?

Mr Vara: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her efforts in helping to spread the important message about this groundbreaking reform. I agree that small businesses need to advise their employees of the changes, which is why the Government have launched a new national communications campaign for small and micro-employers, as well as for individuals.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): Would it not be much more sensible, financially secure and efficient and beneficial to pensioners to establish a compulsory state earnings-related pensions scheme for all, with defined benefits, in place of the Government's auto-enrolment scheme?

Mr Vara: It is important that we get people to recognise they need to think about the future. Some 10 million eligible people will qualify for auto-enrolment, of whom 9 million will be saving more or saving for the first time. I am also happy to say that 3 million to 4 million of them are women.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): We on the SNP Benches are happy to support the Government's policy of auto-enrolment, as we think it important that people save for the longer-term. Last week, however, Australia announced it would be stepping back from its policy of pensions freedom after many over-70s ran out of cash. Will the Government reconsider giving guidance to pensioners advising them to secure an income in retirement?

Mr Vara: We are giving as much guidance as we can. Pension Wise is there; the Money Advice Service, which I have mentioned, has its advisory firms; and there is also the internet. If people want further advice, they will be guided to it by Pension Wise.

Temporary Accommodation

4. **Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of poverty on increases in the number of people living in temporary accommodation since 2010. [901925]

6. **Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of poverty on increases in the number of people living in temporary accommodation since 2010. [901928]

14. **Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Lab): What estimate he has made of the change in the number of people requiring temporary accommodation since 2010. [901936]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): As hon. Members will be aware, the administration of temporary accommodation is a matter for local authorities, but I hope they will agree that the best route out of poverty is to support people into employment, and I am proud that we have achieved an employment rate of 73.6%, the highest since records began in 1971.

Matthew Pennycook: Official figures show that in England the total number of homeless households in temporary accommodation has risen by an alarming 26% over the last five years. In my local area, it has risen by 55% in the last 18 months. The Minister will know that being placed in temporary accommodation is not only traumatic for the families but incredibly costly. Given that his Department's policies have been a key driver in this increase, what is he doing, in conjunction with his colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government, to come up with an urgent solution to the problem?

Justin Tomlinson: Today, the number of households in temporary accommodation is 66,890, and the all-time high in September 2004 was 50% higher than that. The average time that households spend in temporary accommodation is now seven months less than when we came into office in 2010. Working with DCLG, we are introducing measures to build more houses. Over this Parliament, we expect a further 275,000 affordable houses to be built, which is the fastest rate in 20 years.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Discretionary housing payments were intended to mitigate some of the effects of welfare cuts—housing benefit and the benefit cap—and to prevent homelessness. In my local authority, however, half of expenditure is going to support households that are already homeless and in temporary accommodation. Will the Minister tell us what proportion of expenditure nationally is going on paying for existing temporary accommodation? Does he think that is the point of discretionary housing payments?

Justin Tomlinson: We are making available £800 million for discretionary housing payments over this Parliament, which is an increase of 40%. The key is that it is discretionary for each local authority. In addition, to recognise the additional costs within London, £60 per household is provided per week to the local authority.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab): Petrus Community, a homeless charity in Rochdale has told me that there has been a significant increase in the number of people requiring temporary accommodation. The figures show that it has nearly doubled over the last five years of this Government. The charity blames these results on the bedroom tax, benefit sanctions, and employment and support allowance claimants being wrongly declared fit for work. What will the Government do about the situation in Rochdale?

Justin Tomlinson: The key is providing more houses. A further 800,000 new homes have been built since 2009, housing starts are at their highest level since 2007, and a further 275,000 affordable houses will be built during this Parliament. Through the new homes bonus, we are offering additional incentives to build further affordable houses.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Enfield is significantly affected by increases in temporary accommodation and by child poverty. Does the Minister agree that family breakdown is the key factor that needs to be taken into account when assessing and tackling the root causes of child poverty?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank my hon. Friend for making that very powerful point. To recognise the difference it can make, that factor is one of the key measures within the life chances strategy.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Further to the question about those living in temporary accommodation, does the Minister agree that, in order to get to the root causes of poverty, it is important to tackle not just family breakdown but workless households?

Justin Tomlinson: That is why we rightly celebrate the 2 million new private sector jobs that have been created since we came into office. We will continue to deliver a strong economy that will create jobs, which are the best route out of poverty.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): The Tory-Liberal Democrat Government tried to cut housing benefit some nine times. Since May, the Government have been trying again. All this has achieved is a massive increase in the number of homeless families in temporary accommodation, the largest housing benefit bill we have ever seen, and huge amounts of discretionary housing payments being given to local authorities. I am sure that it has occurred to the Minister—he is an intelligent man—that the answer is to build more real affordable housing. Would he like to have a quiet word with the Department responsible and ask it to pull the Housing and Planning Bill, because it will simply result in the sell-off of more and more affordable social housing?

Justin Tomlinson: The right-to-buy policy is a deal that we have secured with housing associations to give tenants the right to buy. The homes will be sold on a one-for-one basis, which creates new, modern stock and additional jobs. People who work hard should not be blocked from a chance to own their home, which I very much support.

Employment Support: Young People

5. **Stuart Andrew** (Pudsey) (Con): What support his Department is providing to young people seeking work. [901926]

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): Tackling youth unemployment is a priority for this Government. We are determined that young people should not slip into a life on benefits. That is why our Department provides a broad range of support for young people, in addition to the standard Jobcentre Plus offer.

Stuart Andrew: Having experienced periods of unemployment in my youth, I am acutely aware of how tough it can be on individuals. Does my hon. Friend welcome the fact that youth unemployment in my Pudsey constituency has fallen by 49% in the last month? Is that not proof that the economic plan is delivering the jobs and apprenticeships needed to give job security for our young people?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That fall in unemployment is due to the fact that the economic plan is working and the economy is growing. However, we also recognise that young people need tailored support so that they can secure employment opportunities, and we have therefore introduced adviser time in jobcentres, work experience placements, the Work programme, Help to Work and the innovation fund.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): The tax credit system has undoubtedly played a major role in encouraging people to take up employment by making work pay, and has made a massive contribution to the employment figures that Ministers frequently cite. Are the Government aware that if they proceed with their tax credit cuts, some people will pay a huge effective tax rate—perhaps as high as 93%—and that that will be a massive disincentive for those who actually do go out to work?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. By making changes in both the welfare system and the tax system, we are ensuring that work pays. The hon. Gentleman will be fully aware that next April we will introduce a new national living wage, which will boost the incomes of people receiving low pay, and will be supplemented by childcare measures. Those will serve as pure incentives that will support them and help them into work. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) says, "Give us the evidence." Where is the evidence and where are the facts that she and her team are providing? *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Lady has data to prove her case, she is welcome to share them with me, but the Government know for a fact that more people will be better off as a result of the new national living wage and free childcare, and because it will pay to be in work rather than depending on welfare, which is the policy that the Opposition are offering.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the National Apprenticeship Service, South Staffordshire College, Staffordshire University and those running advanced people management courses, all of whom will join me this month at an apprenticeship seminar that I am holding to help create new career opportunities for young people seeking work in Cannock Chase?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Apprenticeship fairs and engagement with employers are the right way to encourage young people not just to train and acquire new skills, but to secure new career opportunities through apprenticeships. I commend her for the work that she is doing in her constituency, and wish her well with her apprenticeship fair.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Minister seems to have forgotten that not only are people under the age of 25 losing their tax credits, but they will not receive the higher minimum wage when it is introduced next year. Does not the tax credit cut mean that the Tories really are not the party for workers, and does that not apply doubly to young people?

Priti Patel: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the last Labour Government introduced a minimum wage at a differential rate for young people, so we will take no lectures or lessons from his party. Let me also emphasise that when it comes to supporting young people, this Government are focusing on developing the skills and work experience of our young people through the youth obligation. That, too, is something that his party completely neglected when it was in government.

Benefits: EU Nationals

8. **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on his Department of restricting benefits for EU nationals. [901930]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): Since the start of last year we have been taking action through a range of measures to restrict access to benefits for EU migrants looking for work in the UK, because the last Labour Government left us an open door. That will ensure that advantage is not taken of our welfare system, and that the system is also fair to those who pay into it. It is estimated that changes made by my Department and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs will save more than half a billion pounds over the next few years.

Mr Bone: Does the excellent Secretary of State agree that it would be easier and more efficient for us to treat all EU citizens in the same way, and allow into the country only the ones whom we want here? Would not the end of free movement make his life much easier?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend started so well. However, I will avoid his blandishment, and take myself even further than I might have.

I remind my hon. Friend—who is doing much to promote himself to a job in the Government—that no one who is unemployed and not a British citizen will be able to receive universal credit at all, which is a huge step towards the arrangement that he is after.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State for all the efforts that he is making to restrict benefits from European citizens within the framework of the law, but does he agree that the only way in which the country will ever gain complete control over benefits policy for EU citizens is by leaving the European Union?

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): That's what he used to say.

Mr Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister has given the country a referendum on that matter, which is a huge step forward for the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) and everyone else—they will all have a vote. My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) will, at that moment, be able to make that powerful argument. I am sure, with his rhetoric, he may yet carry the day.

In-work Poverty

9. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of in-work poverty; and if he will make a statement. [901931]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): Work is, as my hon. Friends have said, the best route out of poverty, and that is why we are focused on getting people into employment. We have made significant progress and have the highest employment rate on record with over 2 million more people in work since 2010. The number of people in in-work poverty is 200,000 lower than at its peak under Labour in 2008-09.

Alan Brown: As always, the Secretary of State refers back to statistics relating to the previous Labour Government, but the way to solve in-work poverty is not to cut tax credits. Is he aware of analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggesting that for the 8.4 million working households currently eligible for benefits or tax credits, the new proposed increase in the minimum wage will, on average, offset the cuts by only 26%? That will lead to an increase in in-work poverty. What will he do about that?

Mr Duncan Smith: Let me pick the hon. Gentleman up on a couple of points. First, since the Government came to power, the number of people living in working families and not in poverty is up by about 1.7 million, compared with 2009-10. The number of people in in-work poverty peaked in 2008-09 and the latest figures are 200,000 lower than that peak. On the IFS, it is worth reminding him that in a recent interview on tax credits its director said that the Chancellor had taken the decisions to protect some of the poorest people on tax credits. That is where we are. The Chancellor is clearly looking at the last vote and he will come forward with further measures.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): In trying to deal with in-work poverty, the Living Wage Foundation today unveiled its new, very carefully calculated rates of £9.40 for London and £8.25 outside the capital. They are designed to reflect the realistic costs of living and average wages. Will the Secretary of State tell us why, therefore, he and his Government continue to describe their new rate, the minimum rate for the over-25s of £7.20, as a national living wage?

Mr Duncan Smith: I made the decision for my Department to pay the London living wage to all the cleaners and everybody else who works on contract. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor came forward with a very generous position in the Budget to raise the national wage to £9 by 2020. That is a huge increase. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to tell me why, throughout the 13 years of the previous Labour Government, they never engaged with raising it to the national living wage either.

Owen Smith: The Labour Government introduced the minimum wage in the teeth of opposition from the Conservative party. I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State pays, in his Department, the London living wage, but continuing to describe the national living wage as just that undermines both the campaign and the concept for a real living wage that people can genuinely afford to live on. The under-25s, as we have heard, will not benefit from this. Is the reason for that, as the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock) has told us, that young people are viewed by this Government as unproductive and therefore worth less money?

Mr Duncan Smith: For a moment, I forgot myself. I have been rather churlish. I did not welcome the hon. Gentleman to his post. I welcome him now to his post without reservation. *[Interruption.]* Well, that is not what he said on Second Reading of the welfare Bill, when he abstained, having decided since that he is really opposed to it. But never mind, the road to Damascus has a new route—I think it is called career.

Moving on, it is this Government who increased the minimum wage to £6.70 and the living wage to £9 by 2020. Universal credit improves work incentives and supports childcare, with up to 85% of childcare costs covered. The lowest paid and the poorest will be best protected by what we are proposing, and not by leaving the minimum wage where it was under the previous Labour Government.

Benefit Cap

11. **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What estimate he has made of the number of households to which the benefit cap no longer applies. [901933]

19. **Heather Wheeler** (South Derbyshire) (Con): What estimate he has made of the number of households to which the benefit cap no longer applies. [901941]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): The benefit cap is having a long-term and positive effect on those who are trying to find work, and on people's lives generally. More than 60,000 households have been capped since April 2013, and as of May 2015, more than 40,000 households were no longer subject to the benefit cap. Of those, 16,300 households have moved into work.

Andrew Bridgen: I have good news from North West Leicestershire where two thirds of the households to which a benefit cap applied are no longer subject to that cap. Does that show that the Government are successfully targeting taxpayers' money in a way that encourages benefit recipients to seek work and reorder their finances, in exactly the same way that those in work do?

Mr Duncan Smith: Yes. The benefit cap is introducing fairness, and the claimant count in my hon. Friend's constituency is down by 54% since 2010, and the youth claimant count by 64%. We want even more people to benefit from the financial and wider rewards of employment, and that is why we are reforming welfare and getting on with the job.

Heather Wheeler: Since the introduction of the benefit cap, some three quarters of households affected by it in South Derbyshire have taken steps so that they are no longer affected, and that is testimony to those who work tirelessly to help families improve their lot. Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming that, and assure me that efforts will continue to help people turn their lives around, and away from dependency and into work?

Mr Duncan Smith: I absolutely agree, and as I have said, the benefit cap is working. We are changing the levels at which that cap is set to improve it and to make it work further around the country. In my hon. Friend's area, the east midlands, the number of workless households has fallen by 68,000 under this Government—households that are now benefiting from that return to work.

Family Stability

12. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What steps he has taken to ensure that his Department's policies promote family stability. [901934]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): Family stability is at the heart of this Government because it creates better outcomes for children and society. We have taken a number of steps to promote family stability, including the family test, investing more than £8 million in relationship support, introducing the marriage tax allowance, and increasing childcare support to promote work as the best foundation for family stability.

Jeremy Lefroy: I welcome the Secretary of State's answer. The cost of relationship and family breakdown has been estimated at some £47 billion a year. I welcome the support for relationship advice, but I ask the Secretary of State to do more on that and to help turn around the lives of troubled families.

Mr Duncan Smith: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend. He has made support for families an important issue, and I have talked to him on a number of occasions. I believe that the troubled families programme is critical in supporting families with multiple and often highly complex problems to turn their lives around. Between 2013 and 2015, the DWP created 150 troubled families employment advisers to support people, and 116,000 families have been turned around with nearly 12,000 adults moved into continuous employment. I hope that helps my hon. Friend to understand that the Government are serious about this issue.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Poverty is a destructive element for family stability. Has the Secretary of State read the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, "Monitoring poverty and social exclusion in Wales 2015"? It points out that working families and young people in Wales are at greater risk of poverty now than they were a decade ago, that 45% of all part-time jobs are classified as low paid, and that for those who work part time or are self-employed, the number of families living in poverty has increased by 100,000 in the past decade. It states that changes in the Welfare Bill will be damaging for families in Wales. Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that?

Mr Duncan Smith: I acknowledge that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has written its report, and it has said many things in the past about what we have been doing. As I said earlier, the number of families that have risen out of poverty directly as a result of our changes has been dramatic. As the hon. Lady well knows, Wales had a difficult time in the recession, but unemployment is now falling dramatically and employment is rising. I believe that the best way to get people out of poverty is to get them into work, and eventually into full-time work. That is happening right now.

Carers

16. **Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the effect on family carers in receipt of carer's allowance of reforms to benefits and other financial support. [901938]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): This Government recognise the need to protect and support the most vulnerable in society including pensioners, those with disabilities and their carers. Stronger rights for carers have been introduced through the Care Act 2014. Since 2010, carer's allowance has increased from £53.90 to £62.10 a week, and in April 2015 the earnings limit for carers was increased by 8% to £110 a week.

Barbara Keeley: Indeed, but now there is a real threat, because around 700,000 family carers on carer's allowance who work 16 hours a week at the minimum wage and can therefore claim working tax credit are going to be hit by the Government's proposed tax credit cuts. The exact number is not known, but it is probably quite a lot of that group. Most of those carers cannot increase their working hours because they have such a big caring workload. They deserve, in my view, to be exempt from the Government's tax credit cuts, so are DWP Ministers and the care Minister arguing now for this group of carers to be protected from the cuts?

Justin Tomlinson: The Chancellor said he will set out in the autumn statement what he will do to address the concerns some have raised about the transition from a high welfare, low wage economy to a low welfare, higher wage economy. As it stands today, we spend over £2 billion—a record amount—on supporting the valuable work carers provide in society, and the inter-ministerial meeting this Thursday, in which I will actively participate, will look at further ways in which we can support carers.

Long-term Unemployment

17. **Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): What progress he has made on reducing the number of people in long-term unemployment. [901939]

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): Long-term unemployment has continued to fall and is down by well over 250,000 compared with 2010, falling to its lowest level in over six years.

Mrs Gillan: I applaud the Government's current work in reducing the number of people in long-term unemployment, which is really impressive. May I particularly welcome the commitment to halve the disability employment gap? Does the Minister realise, however, that only 15% of autistic adults are in full-time paid employment? What progress will she make to address the gap in this specific disability and provide autistic people with the opportunities they deserve?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is more to do in this space. We have over 200,000 more people with disabilities in work than this time last year. We will build on that and continue to secure opportunities for autistic adults to get a job and remain in employment.

21. [901944] **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Is my hon. Friend aware of the dramatic fall in long-term unemployment in Southend West of 49%? Please will she reassure me that the Government will continue to pursue the economic policies that have made this happen so that we reach the happy position where there is a job available for everyone who wishes to work?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the record levels of employment in his wonderful constituency and across Essex, which is booming when it comes to private sector jobs. We can never be complacent. The claimant count has nearly halved since 2010, and it is encouraging that we see through our long-term economic plan, with more and more people in private sector employment than ever before.

Topical Questions

T1. [901912] **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): Today the Legatum Institute is publishing is global prosperity index. I raise it because it ranks countries on a number of measures, including the economy and levels of opportunity, with the UK rising nine places in the economic index, which is the latest evidence showing the positive impact of our reforms. As today's report shows, thanks to our welfare reforms and economic reforms more people than ever have the opportunity to benefit from the dignity and sense of purpose that comes from having a job.

Mark Pawsey: I have been contacted by a number of constituents who have been in receipt of a Motability vehicle and have appealed against a PIP assessment. They tell me that it can take months for their appeal to be heard, during which their entitlement to the vehicle, to which expensive adaptations have sometimes been made, is withdrawn. What steps can the Minister take to ensure that those rightly in receipt of a Motability vehicle retain it?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): We are working closely with Motability to put in place a package of support for those who lose their eligibility. Claimants will be able to keep their vehicles for almost two months and most claimants receive a one-off payment of up to £2,000 to maintain their mobility. In addition, we have reformed the DWP appeals process with the introduction of the mandatory reconsideration. This enables disputes to be addressed more quickly. Finally, Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service continues to focus on reducing waiting times, and I would be happy to work with my hon. Friend further to see what progress can be made.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Given the considerable disquiet in the country about cuts to tax credits, not to mention the alarm on the Secretary of State's side of the House, where 20 of his own MPs have said that the Government are in danger of cutting a lifeline to working families, does he now regret describing tax credits as a "bribe"?

Mr Duncan Smith: The hon. Lady should remember exactly how the money was spent. If she looks back, she will find that in the run-up to the 2005 general election, the then Chancellor raised the spending on tax credits, strangely, by 71%. After that the rate stayed pretty flat, but before the 2010 election it was suddenly raised again by nearly 23%. I simply say to the hon. Lady that if she does the maths, she might wonder why Labour lost the 2010 election.

T4. [901915] **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): Will the introduction of universal credit, and all the associated data that that entails, enable the Government and the

Department to help young people on low incomes to find new opportunities to progress into higher-paid jobs?

Mr Duncan Smith: Yes. What happens now when someone on jobseeker's allowance gets a job is that they disappear and nobody sees them. Under universal credit they will stay with their adviser, who will help them with any subsidiary training, help them to find extra hours if they want them, and help them to sort out any problems at work. That is a remarkable change, and it will give us the opportunity to really help people to progress in work.

T2. [901913] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): According to the Office for National Statistics, nearly one in four jobs in my city of Sheffield pays less than the real living wage. On the day that the living wage is being increased to £8.25 an hour, will the Secretary of State congratulate the Living Wage Foundation on its work and outline what he will do to ensure that more people are paid the real living wage, which is now over £1 an hour more than the Government's bogus national living wage?

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): This Government are very clear that it is through our welfare policies that we are ensuring that work pays. As the hon. Gentleman heard me saying earlier, we are introducing a national living wage next April which will ensure that work always pays and that people in the country are given a pay rise.

T5. [901916] **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): Will the Minister tell the House what actions the Department is taking to support the small businesses in Romford and the London borough of Havering that are seeking to provide support and training to adults so that they can develop skills for successful employment?

Priti Patel: I know that small businesses in my hon. Friend's constituency are flourishing and expanding at an impressive rate. Jobcentre Plus works with a range of providers to make specialist courses available, covering information and communications technology as well as many construction courses. In particular, we are working with businesses to ensure that the local labour market is growing in the right way and that people are getting access to the skills they need.

T3. [901914] **Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): With one in four workers in Erdington earning less than the living wage, 82% of children are being brought up in families that are dependent on tax credits. Does the Secretary of State not accept that this is the worst possible time to cut tax credits, and that those families will not be compensated by his phoney living wage? Will he join me in welcoming the initiative taken today by the Labour-led Birmingham City Council to declare that no Brummie in the city should earn less than the real living wage?

Mr Duncan Smith: Despite all the other arguments, the Labour Government had 13 years in power and they let the national minimum wage fall further behind than ever before. It is this Government who have increased the minimum wage and who are now proposing a real living wage of £9 at the end of this Parliament.

T6. [901917] **Nicola Blackwood** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): I welcome the Minister's commitment to introducing a yellow card system for sanctions, but does he agree that we also need to ensure that claimants with mental health problems are placed in the right group in the first place? Will he reaffirm the commitment that I received from his predecessor, following a tragic constituency case, to improve mental health training for assessors and decision makers?

Justin Tomlinson: This is an important area, in which the Government have rightly invested an extra £1.25 billion in the March 2015 Budget. We have rolled out a £43 million series of pilots to provide face-to-face, group, online and telephone support. Also, we have mental health and wellbeing partnership managers and disability employment advisers right across the jobcentre network. We will continue to push further training, as this is an important issue.

T8. [901919] **Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Over the previous Parliament, the number of working families in London claiming housing benefit increased by 84%. Over the past three years, London councils have been able to replace only one in seven of the council homes they have sold. Does the Minister see any connection between those two figures?

Mr Duncan Smith: What the hon. Gentleman failed to remind us all is that under the last Government the number of people claiming housing benefit, both out of work and in work, rose dramatically, whereas under this Government the number of those claiming housing benefit out of work has fallen dramatically.

T7. [901918] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome the reforms to welfare, which have helped 609 people in my constituency back into work since 2010. Moving from benefits into work can cause cash-flow difficulties, so I additionally welcome the initiative to put Jobcentre Plus advisers into food banks to make sure those delays do not occur. What progress are we making on speeding up benefit claims to make sure those situations do not occur?

Mr Duncan Smith: We want to ensure that anybody who goes to a location such as a food bank has the ability to check whether there is a problem—if there is, let us deal with it there. We have also advertised hugely across all the jobcentres, telling everybody they can get benefit advances, hardship loans and so on. We are now beginning to find that when they go to the food banks, they are also being helped to get back into work, which is an added bonus.

T9. [901920] **Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): On the administration of the benefit sanctions regime, yesterday's *Sunday Herald* reported new figures showing that in nearly 300,000 cases benefit claimants had been penalised with sanctions without being officially notified—that includes an estimated 28,000 cases in Scotland alone. Will the Minister apologise to all those who have faced destitution without proper notice? Will he finally commission an independent review of this badly intentioned and poorly administered system?

Mr Duncan Smith: I do not recognise those figures, but I will say to the hon. Lady that back in 2001 the last Labour Government decided to move—

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: I am not interested in the last Labour Government.

Mr Duncan Smith: Well, she asked the question and if she does not want the answer, that is fine by me. What I am saying to her is that the last Labour Government moved to a clerical system. We have reviewed that approach over the past year and decided that, under the changes we want, going back to an automatic system is much better. The recent statistics released last week show that the rate of appeal was slightly higher among those who did not receive the initial letter appeal than among those who did; we therefore do not think there is a difference. We will be writing to people to remind them that they still have rights to appeal if they wish to do so.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): A substantial benefit of the issues relating to tax credits is that more companies are encouraged to pay the national living wage—£9 an hour—now. What conversations has my right hon. Friend had with the Chancellor about incentives that we could provide to companies to pay £9 an hour?

Mr Duncan Smith: Yes, the No. 1 reality is that companies that believe the economy is well run will invest in their workforce and give them a better salary. The problem was that the last Labour Government set up a system that encouraged companies to pay low wages and leave them static. The change now is this: universal credit is making them move on; higher salaries; a better wage packet. Many companies are already paying the higher level—they have come and said they will.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I was pleased to meet the Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People to discuss children with Batten disease who were having to re-apply for disability living allowance, but we were disappointed to be told that we would not get a formal response. Will the Minister ensure that the Batten Disease Family Association gets a formal response about how the Department will take the recommendations forward?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue. I am very disappointed to hear what he says and I will make sure that a formal response is sent. I was very grateful to both the hon. Gentleman and the Batten Disease Family Association UK for taking the time to help proactively support the changes that we needed to make.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Does the Minister share my view that a huge part of tackling youth unemployment is ensuring that people leave the education system work-ready? What has been done to help achieve that?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in what she says. I know that she is doing a great deal in her constituency to champion apprenticeships, which of course support young people not just in getting into work, but in developing long-term careers.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab):According to the Department's own figures, pension contributions by the self-employed have fallen year on year for the past five years. What is the Secretary of State going to do to reverse that trend?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): We are liaising with companies and individuals and also ensuring that people take some individual responsibility, by looking at their statements and contributions and thinking ahead. We are also encouraging companies to be proactive and to ensure that their workers take part in the auto-enrolment process and that those workers are protected.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Building a broad skills set is crucial for entering the world of work, so is the Department actively promoting schemes such as the National Citizen Service, which provides a really unique opportunity to do exactly that?

Justin Tomlinson: We have already had cross-departmental meetings to look at how we can further promote the National Citizen Service. As an MP, I can say that it is one of the schemes that was introduced in the previous Parliament of which I am proudest. It absolutely transforms children into young very employable adults; it is a brilliant scheme.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Department of Health about passporting on to the new disability benefits, without the need for further assessment, those people who received contaminated blood from the NHS and contracted HIV and hepatitis C? That is causing such concern to those who are affected.

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I will have to provide her with a written update.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): Given the Government's ambition to have all benefit claims online by the end of this Parliament, will the Minister update the House on what discussions he has had with internet service providers to ensure that those on low incomes can get online?

Mr Duncan Smith: The ambition is to get as many claims online as we can, but there will be some people who cannot get online. Under universal credit, we are keen to ensure that people can, if necessary, continue to make paper submissions, and that they will be treated inside the jobcentres, but we will get as many online as we can. We have been talking constantly to the providers about how best to do this, and also about matters of security.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): For clarification, is the Secretary of State pleased that, as a result of sustained parliamentary and public pressure, the Chancellor has been forced to reconsider the proposals on tax credits? Is that a matter that meets with his approval?

Mr Duncan Smith: Everything the Chancellor proposes meets with my approval, as I am a member of the Government.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara), said earlier that letters were sent to all women born in the 1950s to inform them of changes to the state pension age. I have to say to him that the campaigning group, Women Against State Pension Inequality, disagrees with him. I have constituents who were not informed of the changes, and they suddenly discovered that they were not going to retire soon and that they had many years to retirement. Will the Minister look again at that issue and reconsider whether that group of women affected—there are many hundreds of thousands of them—can now have transitional protection?

Mr Vara: I am surprised to hear what the hon. Lady says, but I am happy to look into the matter further. The information that I have is that there was communication with those people, but I will correspond with her.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I note that, on the Order Paper today, we have the first instance of English votes for English laws certification from you. I also note that on the notes to the Bill, it states specifically on page 60 that clauses 108 to 110 relate to Scotland, while in the certification they are said to relate to England only. May I request clarification of that apparent anomaly?

Mr Speaker: I commend the hon. Lady on the predictable application of her beady eye to these important matters, but she should rest content in my own certification decisions. In other words, if there appears to be any conflict between my certificate and what happens to appear in the explanatory notes, she should be content with the former as the definitive guide. Perhaps we can leave it there for now.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh *rose—*

Mr Speaker: We cannot have a debate about it, but I will indulge the hon. Lady further, very briefly.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Given that Bills are to be certified at this stage in proceedings, what thought has been given to intimate to Members who may be affected by such certification when there is a difference between what is in the notes and what is in the Bill and the certification, as Members might wish to make representations to you on those matters?

Mr Speaker: Decisions on certification are what matters. I do not want to anticipate what might be seen to be, or indeed be, contrary elements. The hon. Lady is now well familiar with the geography of the Palace of Westminster. She knows exactly where the Table Office is and, to judge by her general high level of activity in this Chamber, I rather suspect that she makes frequent visits to it. She knows how to go to the Table Office, how to consult the Clerks, and how to consult me. At any rate she can be untroubled on this matter for today and, I hope, in the future. She might not always like the certification decisions, but she need not be in any doubt what they are.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Before the hon. Gentleman, in a state of uncontrollable excitement, rises to his feet to raise a further point of order, may I politely suggest to colleagues—I think the hon. Lady had in some sense anticipated this—that I say what I was going to say in any case on certification now, appertaining to today? If after that the appetite of hon. Members to raise further points of order remains, doubtless I will be the first to hear it.

I remind the House that I have certified some provisions of the Housing and Planning Bill under Standing Order No. 83J in relation to England, and some in relation to England and Wales. I further remind the House that this does not affect proceedings in the debate on Second Reading, or indeed in Committee or on Report. After Report stage, I will consider the Bill again for certification and, if required, the Legislative Grand Committee will be asked to consent to certified provisions. I hope that is clear.

Roger Mullin: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hoped that that would have satisfied you, Mr Mullin, but apparently not.

Roger Mullin: Your clarification was helpful, Mr Speaker, but not pertinent to my point. Will you clarify the extent to which possible Barnett consequential effects are taken into account in the certification process, such as those in the Bill we are about to consider, which proposes the extension of national infrastructure projects to encompass housing?

Mr Speaker: The short answer to that question is no, because it is incumbent on me to make decisions on certification without explanation. That might seem not readily obvious to new entrants to the House, and I do not mean that discourteously, but it is very much in conformity with the usual practice of what is expected of the Speaker. If I may try to be helpful to the hon. Gentleman, the analogy is with the decision on an urgent question. The Speaker makes a decision on urgent questions that is not then subject to debate or a requirement to explain it in the Chamber. The decision is made, it is communicated and that, for the Chamber, is the end of it. I hope that is helpful—but, whether it is or not, that is what I have to say.

Housing and Planning Bill

Second Reading

Mr Speaker: I must inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Every Parliament that is elected has a responsibility to the future and to do all that it can to ensure that the lives of the next generation are better than those of past generations. Nowhere is that more important than in ensuring that the next generation have the homes they need. Indeed, it is not just about the next generation. The impact of much of the public policy that we debate is on the here and now or the next few years ahead. If we look around any city, town or village in Britain, it is obvious that housing endures for many decades and, in some cases, for hundreds of years. Every home that is built is much more than a pile of bricks and mortar or concrete and glass. The homes that we build shape the lives, for better or for worse, of generation after generation of people who live in them.

As Churchill said:

"We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1943; Vol. 393, c. 403.]

Providing the homes that we need is a responsibility that unites us all in this House. For many years now, we have not built enough homes in this country. That is true of successive Governments and has been true for many decades. New households have been forming in Britain at a rate of about 200,000 a year, yet the last year in which we built 200,000 homes was in 1988.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that over 4,800, or 7%, of children in Enfield live in temporary accommodation? I fear that his Bill, which damages the number of affordable homes available, will make this problem immeasurably worse.

Greg Clark: As I hope the right hon. Lady will recognise from my remarks, our purpose and intent in this Bill is to increase the number of homes—that is our absolute objective—so that those children have the prospect of a roof over their heads in the years to come.

I was reflecting on how it has been many years—more than a generation—since this country built the number of homes that we need. During the financial crash, housebuilding in Britain suffered what might be called a cardiac arrest, because in the third quarter of 2008 we were fewer than 20,000 homes away from stopping building altogether—the lowest rate of peacetime housebuilding since the 1920s. It was not just that the banks would not lend, though they would not; it was a reckoning for a decade in which we had a top-down planning system, which the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), when he was Planning Minister, was magnanimous enough to concede had few friends. When that was imposed, it built bureaucracy and resentment but not many homes. It followed a decade in which the number of affordable homes fell by nearly half a million, and in which fewer than 200 council houses a year were built in the whole of England. It was a lost decade in which the rising level of home ownership fell into reverse in 2003 for the first time since the 1960s.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State explain how selling housing association properties, subsidising that sale by selling council properties—half the stock, in the case of my local authority—reducing local authority incomes to build properties by reducing rent, and allowing developers to get away without building any social homes helps the thousands of people in housing need in my constituency?

Greg Clark: I will come on to address those points, but I say now that the reason it helps is that we are requiring a new home to be built for every home that is sold to council tenants, and that will improve the housing stock in London.

We had a decade when the housing market almost ground to a complete halt and home ownership fell for the first time since the 1960s. It was a period in which the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), who is in his place, said, reflecting the shared view on this, that the Government whom he had supported for 13 years did not build enough homes. Other Labour Members, including Front Benchers such as the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), agreed, concluding that Labour did not do enough when in government. We agree. As is obvious from what I have said, Governments of different parties did not do enough over the years.

During the previous Parliament, home building revived and we got Britain building again. We scrapped the regional spatial strategies and we reformed planning policy. That was fiercely resisted at the time. Some of us, including the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods), who I believe is to wind up for the Opposition, will remember those debates, in which Members were very critical of our proposals. Now, three years on, nearly 250,000 homes a year are receiving planning permission—up by nearly 60% since 2010.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Secretary of State send a very clear message to councils that there is a huge demand from people who want to be homeowners for affordable homes that they can purchase, and that councils can hit their affordable home targets by bringing those forward?

Greg Clark: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. If we reflect on years past, we see that when 86% of people aspire to become homeowners it is not just homes for rent that are needed, but affordable homes for purchase. We are correcting what has been a historical anomaly.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Secretary of State quoted what I said in a debate during the previous Parliament, when I did accept that the Government whom I supported for 13 years did not build enough homes, but if he looked at the remainder of the quotation, he would see that I said that the problem was that the coalition Government built even fewer.

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that since the previous Government the number of homes being built has increased substantially. In fact, it has increased by over 50% since we came to office. Planning permissions, as I mentioned, are now running at almost 250,000 a year, for the first time in many years getting to the level we need to provide homes for the population as it rises.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Given that the Bill fails to include any legal commitment to replace social homes that are sold under right to buy on a one-to-one basis, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that selling off valuable council homes to fund the extension of right to buy means that we are losing two social homes to rent in return for just one social home to buy? That is an overall loss.

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady will find that the rate of additional stock that is being provided in response to the reinvigorated council right to buy is running at over one for one, and the agreement that we have been able to reach with the housing associations—if she has not had a copy of it, I will make sure that she gets one—makes it very clear that these homes will be replaced on at least a one-for-one basis. I should not say "replaced", because the homes continue to be occupied; they trigger an additional home that is being built.

Sadiq Khan (Tooting) (Lab) *rose—*

Greg Clark: I shall make some progress, then I shall give way. I am coming on to talk about London, and the right hon. Gentleman will no doubt have something to say then.

We scrapped the regional spatial strategies and we saw planning permissions increase as a result of those reforms. We have allowed local communities to have more of a say through neighbourhood planning, and now over 1,600 neighbourhood plans have been adopted or are in production. We built 260,000 affordable homes, nearly a third of them in London, and in the next five years we will build 275,000 more, the most for 20 years. We have helped hundreds of thousands of people achieve their dream of home ownership, with Government schemes such as Help to Buy doubling the number of first-time buyers in the previous Parliament.

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): On affordable homes, when a council insists on a certain percentage of any project having to be affordable, the consequence is that the developer has to pay for them in cross-subsidy by building an extra number of larger homes. The effect then is to squeeze out the smaller two-bedroom and three-bedroom homes, thus cutting away the middle of the housing ladder. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that he has considered this consequence and has addressed it, both in his policy and in the Bill?

Greg Clark: When we wrote the national planning policy framework, one of the things that we intended was that a local community should reflect the entirety of the planning needs in its area for all types of accommodation. That is reinforced in this Bill.

Sadiq Khan: On affordable homes in London, does the right hon. Gentleman accept his Department's own figures, according to which, over the past three years, 9,025 homes have been sold in London under right to buy and there have been 1,310 starts on replacements? That is seven homes sold for every home started. If that is the Government's record, why should we believe that things will be different going forward?

Greg Clark: I was going on to say that in London during the first year of the reinvigorated right to buy, 632 homes were sold and already, a year before the deadline for councils, 1,115 starts have been made. The rate of provision of additional homes in London is running at nearly two for one. I hope the right hon. Gentleman will celebrate that.

When we reinvigorated the right to buy for council tenants, we ensured that every home sold to a resident would allow another home to be built. It is as much a policy for expanding the housing stock as it is for extending home ownership, desirable though that is.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Greg Clark: I shall make some progress.

Nationally, of the 3,054 additional sales made in the first year, 3,337 new properties have been started within two years, and councils have three years to be able to build—a rate of more than one for one. As I said to the right hon. Gentleman, in London the rate of provision of additional housing is running at around two to one. It is worth saying that under Labour, during the time when so few council homes were sold, the rate of new build for every house sold under the right to buy was one in 170. I would have thought that Labour Members could show more humility about that.

David Mackintosh (Northampton South) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree with me, as someone with some experience in this, that the barriers to building new council houses are not about replacing right-to-buy properties, but lie in the planning processes that will be dealt with in the Bill?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is right. From conversations with local authorities right across the country, I have found that one thing they intend to do—to do what Members on both sides of the House want, which is to provide homes for the next generation—is make sure that the planning system is speedier and more accommodating of the need for more homes, especially on brownfield sites, for which the Bill will provide a major boost.

If our task in the last Parliament was to rescue the housing market, our task now is to renew it. Building even at the current rate is not enough. The lost years of housing deficit—building fewer homes than the rate at which new households are forming—has led to a chronic shortage of homes compared with what this country needs. That means getting back to building homes at the rates we last saw in the 1980s and previously, giving hope to the 86% of people in this country who want to become homeowners and taking steps to ensure that properties available for rent are properly managed, with no place for rogue landlords.

To provide these homes will require us to work together—Parliament, central Government and local government, house builders and housing associations—to find the land and grant planning permission, as my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) said, as well as to finance the development, build the homes and give people the chance to own or to rent them. The Bill helps us to do that.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State accept that the failure of the Government to deal with the housing crisis has meant that private rents have reached an all-time high of £803 per month—and more in London—and have continued to rise, with a 20% increase since 2010? Yet wages have failed to keep up with that increase.

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady makes my case for me. The consequence of such a long period of failing to provide the homes we need is of course reflected in their price. That is why the purpose of the Government—and, I hope, of the House—is to build more homes to make sure that they are available in quantity to the next generation.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, for all the howling from Labour Members, the fact that house prices went up threefold to fourfold during the Labour Government is why young people find it so hard to get on to the housing ladder, with house prices accelerating way beyond salaries? Of course, that was during Labour's alleged economic miracle.

Greg Clark: I could not agree more. It is economics plain and simple. I do not know whether it is Corbynomics, but it is certainly the laws of economics: if we do not build enough homes, prices will go up and get beyond the reach of ordinary people.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): The Bill recognises the aspirations of those who want to own their own home, but does the Secretary of State also recognise the hopes of homeless Londoners who want a decent roof over their heads? Will he recognise that St Mungo's has signed up and agreed to the housing association right to buy, but will he also recognise the importance of receipts remaining in London to cross-subsidise the vital work done by St Mungo's in helping vulnerable Londoners?

Greg Clark: I have said that it is important that we provide more homes across the country, but particular in London, where we know that demand for homes by people of all types—families and single people—is very acute. The purpose of the Bill is to allow us to provide more homes in London, as I shall go on to say.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Greg Clark: I will give way, but I must then make some progress.

Mrs Gillan: May I extend a warm welcome to this long overdue legislation? May I point out to my right hon. Friend that in my local authority area, Chiltern District Council, we have some of the highest average property prices in the country? Even with the 20% discount applied to properties known as starter homes, it will therefore be jolly difficult for some of our young people to afford those homes. In addition, will he tell us how my local council can prioritise those homes for local people?

Greg Clark: We need to provide homes of all sorts. It is important to continue to provide homes for rent and to provide homes for purchase. My right hon. Friend will have constituents who have grown up in her constituency, who have had family connections there for many years and whose friends and relations are there, and they have to leave her area not because they want to, but because they have to. It is important to provide more homes in areas such as hers, as well as across the country.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): In areas such as Brighton and Hove, where land for development is extremely constrained, it is likely that the money that is raised from the right to buy will be spent elsewhere, outside the city. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the money raised through right to buy will be spent in the city?

Greg Clark: What the hon. Gentleman describes is not the experience across the country, including in Brighton and Hove. Councils are overwhelmingly able to build extra properties as a result of the sale of existing homes. I am not aware that Brighton and Hove proposes to return the money to the Government, which means that it is confident that it will be able to provide the extra homes.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Greg Clark: I am going to make some progress.

Before I took the interventions, I was saying that if we are to find the land, grant the planning permission, finance the development and build the homes, it is essential that the various players in the housing market come together to do it. It cannot be done individually. The Bill will help with that.

Let me take the example of the right to buy. Home ownership is an aspiration for 86% of people in this country. The Bill will make it possible, through the agreement that the housing association sector has made with the Government, to extend the right to buy to all 1.3 million tenants who currently do not have the right to become homeowners. That agreement is good for

"residents, for housing associations and the nation's housing supply. Residents will get the opportunity to realise their dreams of homeownership and housing associations will be able to replace the homes sold, boosting the nation's housing supply."

Those were the words of the head of the housing associations' collective body, the National Housing Federation.

It has been a 30-year injustice that council tenants have had the right to buy their homes but housing association tenants have not. I strongly believe that when they signed a tenancy agreement, housing association tenants did not sign away their aspirations to become homeowners. Housing association tenants share the same hopes and dreams as everyone else. They live on the same streets, they shop in the same stores, their children go to the same schools. It is only right that they should have the same opportunities as council tenants.

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): First, will the Secretary of State confirm that the National Housing Federation does not support the sale of council housing property to fund this policy? Secondly, will he confirm that the purchase of housing association properties will be available to EU nationals after paying taxes for just three years?

Greg Clark: The previous Government reduced the residence qualification for overseas nationals. We have proposed extending it. The combination of the residence requirement for social housing and the requirement to be a resident for three years before the right to buy comes in means that it will be seven years before there is any entitlement for an overseas national.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for the way in which he and his Ministers, especially the Minister for Housing and Planning, have engaged with colleagues from across the House as the legislation has come together. I was pleased when we announced the extension of the right to buy in our manifesto and I will support the Bill tonight. However, some rural communities in my constituency want to know whether the current exemptions in respect of rural exception sites will continue in the extended right to buy. Can the Secretary of State reassure me and my constituents?

Greg Clark: I certainly can. This shows the benefit of having a conversation with everyone who is affected. Colleagues across the House wanted to be reassured that, in those areas where it simply is not possible to provide a new home, a solution could be found to allow their housing stock to be maintained while at the same time allowing those in rural communities, who have the same aspirations as others, to own a home of their own. What we have agreed with the housing association sector, through its proposals, is that, while an association will be able to say that it is not possible to build a new home in certain areas, people will be entitled—this is a real opportunity for our constituents across the country—to apply their discount to a new home that the housing association will build in the nearest area in which it is possible to build one. That is a real result for every rural area in the country.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, if housing associations decide to sell off higher-value properties in rural communities, there must be like-for-like replacement in those communities? Otherwise, the demographic loss of young people from small rural communities will continue.

Greg Clark: The advantage of reaching an agreement with the housing associations, which are locally based and whose mission is to provide homes in their areas, is that they are positively enthusiastic about it, as the head of the National Housing Federation made clear to the Communities and Local Government Committee the other day.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con) *rose—*

Greg Clark: I give way to the former Housing Minister.

Mr Prisk: I commend the Secretary of State for securing a voluntary agreement, which is often better than legislation. Given that this has been agreed for 90% of the sector's housing stock, is it not deeply disappointing that the Labour party is stuck in the past?

Greg Clark: The Labour party's approach, not just in this area, but to our devolution proposals, is genuinely disappointing. I and my colleagues have found that it is entirely possible to talk to and to come to consensual agreement with people who have the same interests as us. The Labour party, however, seems to set its face both against that kind of dialogue, whether it relates to devolution or the matter under discussion, and against our approach to establishing consensus on the best way forward.

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con) *rose—*

Greg Clark: I give way to the Mayor of London.

Boris Johnson: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the arguments he is making. Does he not find it perverse and incredible that the opposition to extending the right to buy to people on low incomes in this country should be mounted not just by the Labour party, but by people who are overwhelmingly owner-occupiers of their own homes?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. For anyone who has any doubt about the policy's personal impact, I will illustrate it by reading an email I received from a young mother on the day on which our right-to-buy agreement with housing associations was announced last month. She wrote that,

> "during the middle of the economic crisis in 2009…I was…made redundant from a job that I had been in for twelve years. I was left with a six year old, a three year old and a newborn baby and life was pretty much as grim as it could get.
>
> For the past five years I have lived in a housing association home. At the time—it was very much a lifeline and I am enormously grateful for the safety, security and peace-of-mind that it brought me."

She went on to say that,

> "up until April of this year—I had simply accepted that this was my life now and would always be. I would forevermore be 'just about' comfortable: 'just about' paying the bills, 'just about' paying for Christmas. 'Just about' living.
>
> But in late April that completely changed for me. I heard somewhere that the Conservatives were going to allow housing association tenants the right to buy their own home…I had completely written off ever being able to achieve that goal.
>
> I voted Conservative in May because of that hope."

She continued:

> "I watched and read intently all about the Conservative's crazy, ridiculous policy. I read the negative fall-out from Housing Associations, from Labour, from literally everywhere…And of course—all of these associations, politicians, media have far bigger voices than people like me. By September I had resigned myself to the fact that this looked like a lost-cause.
>
> I am absolutely eternally grateful to everyone in the Conservative government that helped push this forward. I absolutely cannot wait until the point, hopefully in 2016, where I can be holding the keys to the house that I own. A house that will be my savings for the future. A house that will allow me to pass something onto my three girls.
>
> Please, please pass on my very heartfelt gratitude to everyone involved in ensuring this was made a reality. For me, it's life-changing."

As this lady made clear, this policy, agreed with the housing associations, is giving people up and down the country the chance to fulfil a dream they thought was beyond them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) said, it is disappointing, therefore, that the Opposition are turning their backs on such people's aspirations and trying to take away the hope of home ownership that they have nurtured and which the Bill introduces.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that housing associations have a long, proud history as independent bodies and that the main reason many signed up to this voluntary deal was to avoid their reclassification as public bodies by the Office for National Statistics, but it has now done just that. When did he know that this reclassification was on the cards? Was it before or after he made the agreement with the housing associations?

Greg Clark: I am astonished by the right hon. Gentleman's intervention, because the ONS, completely independent of the Government, has made it clear that the reclassification, which we intended to be temporary, has nothing to do with any action by the Government. The reason for the reclassification is the clumsy—I might even say clunking—provisions of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, taken through the House when he was a Minister. He should be apologising for the predicament into which he put housing associations. As hon. Members will have noticed, one benefit of our agreement with the housing associations is the ability, as reflected in the Bill, to deregulate the housing association sector to correct the damage he did when he was Minister.

John Healey: The Secretary of State gives the House partial information. He will know also that the ONS made this decision in the light of government accounting changes introduced in 2011, not just the provisions of the 2008 Act. So I ask him again: what does he say to those housing associations that believe he has acted in bad faith, knowing this reclassification was on the cards but still willing to do the deal with them?

Greg Clark: It is quite the reverse. It shows the benefits of a voluntary agreement. If we intend, as we do, to recognise the historical voluntary nature of housing associations, we are not going use legislation to thrust them into the public sector, as the right hon. Gentleman did when he was a Minister; we are going to legislate to remove those regulations that put them temporarily in the public sector. If ever there was a vindication of the voluntary approach, rather than the clunking reaching for legislation, which Labour favours, it is in this agreement.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Greg Clark: I have been speaking for more than half an hour, so I will make some progress, but I might give way later.

I pay tribute to the housing associations for having the vision and foresight to see that extending home ownership is completely consistent with their historic mission. The lazy assumption that there is a contradiction between supporting the dreams of homebuyers and ensuring new homes are built must end. I look forward to equally positive engagement with councils—indeed, I have it already—during the passage of the Bill. Their objectives are the same as mine: to ensure that as they release the equity in their high-value properties, they can make sure that more homes are built, adding to the housing supply as well as extending home ownership. At councils' request, we have included in the Bill a flexible approach that does not require the immediate sale of particular properties, but gives us a chance—if they wish to take it—to agree with councils an approach that meets our mutual objectives.

I want to say a word about London, which has come up already in this debate. Building homes in the capital is a priority not only for my hon. Friend the Mayor but for me. Benjamin Disraeli once described London as a "roost for every bird". Like many of his observations, it has turned out to be a prophecy—100 years later, the birds are still flocking and the roost is still growing.

Last year, new housing starts in the capital were a quarter higher than when we came to power, and nearly a third of all affordable homes achieved during the last Parliament were in London. As I have said, after we reinvigorated the right to buy for tenants in London, nearly twice as many homes were built as were sold to their tenants—but I want to do more.

The Mayor has set out the most ambitious plan for housebuilding in the capital since the 1930s, but I want to go further so that a quarter of all the homes we build in England are built in London during the years ahead—a quarter of a million new homes over the next five years. I want the right to buy scheme to be a major part of that, and I will talk to anyone in London local government to ensure that that happens, just as it was possible to have a meeting of minds with the housing associations.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab) *rose—*

Greg Clark: I want to make some progress.

Other measures in the Bill will help. The Mayor has the power to establish development corporations and development orders to speed up the development of new housing across the city. I am absolutely determined to make sure that the Mayor has the ability to deliver the homes that London needs to maintain its position as London's premier world city.

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con) *rose—*

Greg Clark: Speaking of world cities, I shall give way to my right hon. Friend who represents two world cities, the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field).

Mark Field: I thank my right hon. Friend; it seems I am very greedy in that regard. I greatly welcome the fact that the Secretary of State recognises the exceptionalism of our capital city. Much of the Bill makes important progress nationally, but will he also recognise that we need to tailor elements of it to the particular constraints that exist in the capital city. That is relevant to London Members of all parties?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I hope I have made it clear from the Dispatch Box today that the constructive approach that we found easy to accommodate with the housing associations is absolutely open to representatives of London local government—indeed, we are already having some productive conversations.

[Greg Clark]

Let me deal with starter homes. During the last 20 years, the proportion of homeowners under the age of 40 has fallen by a third.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab) *rose—*

Tulip Siddiq *rose—*

Greg Clark: I shall make some progress, if I may, as I know many Members want to speak.

What our generation has taken for granted has been slipping out of reach for many younger people. Planning policy has long recognised the need for local councils to provide for affordable housing as part of their plans. Paragraph 50 of the national planning policy framework sets out this requirement. Housing for affordable rent will always be important, but until recently public policy has had too little to say to those who would like to own their own home yet struggle to do so.

During the last three years, the help to buy scheme has helped 120,000 people with a deposit to buy a home, 80% of whom are first-time buyers. We need to go further locally, too, so the Bill introduces a requirement in planning law for councils to provide, through their planning functions, starter homes available to first-time buyers. During the next five years, we want to ensure that public policy recognises, as it always should have, that providing more affordable homes to buy is an important objective of policy if we are not to shut out the next generation from the opportunities that our generation has enjoyed.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): The Secretary of State is generous in giving way. I welcome many of the measures in the Bill, but following on from the comments about the exceptionalism of London, Oxford now has the most expensive housing compared to income in the country, yet the local area delivered zero affordable homes in 2013-14 and only 10 in 2014-15. It must be accepted that there are some significant local problems, so as the Bill progresses, I ask my right hon. Friend to consider how to deal with problems in such high-cost areas.

Greg Clark: I will indeed. I have been clear about the constructive approach we intend to take, as exemplified in our dealings with housing associations. I think it is incumbent on all councils, including Labour councils, to play their part. This is an imperative for all of us in positions of political leadership to do what is needed to provide homes for the next generation.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con) *rose—*

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab) *rose—*

Emily Thornberry *rose—*

Tulip Siddiq *rose—*

Greg Clark: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) and in a few moments to Opposition Members.

Oliver Colvile: We are talking about aspiration, but does my right hon. Friend recall that Herbert Morrison, the Housing Minister and Peter Mandelson's grandfather, said in 1945 that his Labour Government would end up by trying to

"build the Tories out of London"?

Greg Clark: He did indeed say that. Our approach is to make sure that our period of government is associated with one of the successes that every successful Conservative Government achieve, which is to house the people of our country for generations to come.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Greg Clark: I will give way in a few minutes.

Emily Thornberry: To London Members?

Greg Clark: I think the hon. Lady will agree, on reflection, that I have already been generous in giving way to London Members.

Emily Thornberry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hope it is a genuine point of order. I say that as much in hope as in expectation, but let us hear from the hon. Lady.

Emily Thornberry: The point of order is this, Mr Speaker. The Secretary of State speaks again and again about the Bill's importance in relation to London, but will not take any interventions from any London Members on the Opposition Benches.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady has, in a sense, advertised the claims of London Members, and I am sure that they will be at the forefront of the Secretary of State's mind.

Greg Clark: The record will show, Mr Speaker, that I have been generous in giving way to London Members, including the Labour mayoral candidate. If that does not illustrate a fair approach, I do not know what does.

Sadiq Khan: Will the Secretary of State give way? *(Laughter.)*

Greg Clark: I will not—I am going to make some progress—but the right hon. Gentleman is plucky in his endeavours.

During the last Parliament, we reformed and streamlined the planning system. We abolished more than 1,000 pages of central policy, and revoked the regional spatial strategies. Local councils have responded well to that devolution of power, as we knew they would: 82% of councils have published plans, compared with just 32% in May 2010. Since we introduced the national planning policy framework, the number of new homes planned for locally has increased by 23%, and 1,600 neighbourhood plans are in production or have been adopted.

It is right to continue in that direction of reform, which is why the Bill takes steps to simplify and speed up the process of adopting neighbourhood plans and giving them earlier force. It helps councils to galvanise development in their areas, whether through improvements in the compulsory purchase system or through the establishment of development corporations. In return, however, it tells the 18% of councils that have not yet produced a local plan that five years after the publication of the NPPF in 2012, they will have had enough time in which to do so. If plans have not been produced by then, the Government will have the power to intervene and, working with local people, help bring the process to fruition.

All Members want brownfield land to be prioritised for development. The more of it that is brought back into use, the more our countryside can be safeguarded. The Bill establishes a new strategy register for brownfield land so that councils can have an up-to-date and publicly accessible source of information about land that is suitable for housing.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Greg Clark: I will give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), because he has been patient.

Mr Nick Hurd (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend, whose line of argument I wholly support. Starter homes, to which he referred earlier, are a very good idea, but I fear that the proposed price cap of £450,000 in London could be interpreted by developers as a price guide, thereby rendering such homes unaffordable to young people and those on low and median incomes in London. What reassurance can he give me on that point?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is a cap and not a guide, and we want to see starter homes with prices well below that amount, but it is right to set a maximum.

Tulip Siddiq: The Secretary of State read out a long e-mail earlier. Perhaps he would like to listen to an e-mail that I received from a single mother who is worried about the new threshold that is being applied to the "pay to stay" measure, as a result of which families such as hers, on middle incomes, will be pushed into high levels of poverty in places such as Hampstead and Kilburn.

Greg Clark: I should be happy to see that e-mail, and if the hon. Lady speaks to me after the debate, I will of course take the matter up. However, I think it only fair to expect those who are fortunate enough to be earning a decent salary not to continue to benefit from the subsidy that would otherwise be available to housing associations. The revenues raised by it will remain with housing associations so that they can build up more properties.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I join the Secretary of State in applauding the advent of neighbourhood plans, which have been adopted with enthusiasm by many communities in my constituency, but will he bear in mind that the one organisation that has the power to destroy his policy is the Planning Inspectorate, and will he urge it to respect the wishes of the local community and stay well away when a neighbourhood plan is being developed or is in place?

Greg Clark: I will take my hon. Friend's injunction very seriously. Part of the Bill entrenches the rights of neighbourhoods to produce a neighbourhood plan against, as is sometimes the case, a less than enthusiastic district council. I hope we will see less and less of that, but the measures in the Bill will help.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): The Secretary of State may know that there is some concern among general aviation users and rural communities that they may lose small and medium-sized airfields if they are to be re-designated as brownfield sites. Under planning policy guidance 3 and planning policy statement 3, it was held that even though there was a building that had been previously been developed, the open land around it would not constitute a brownfield site. I hope he can reassure me, and those who share my interest, that airfields will not be classified as brownfield sites.

Greg Clark: I understand my hon. Friend's concern, which he expresses very well. As I think he knows, there is a review of the status of airfields. I will ensure that his views are communicated strongly to my colleagues undertaking that review.

All Members want to see brownfield land prioritised for development. That is why the Bill establishes a new statutory register for brownfield land, so that councils can have an up-to-date and publicly accessible source of information and land for housing. We want to see planning permission given for 90% of those sites by 2020. That will be of particular benefit—this is important—to smaller firms that unfortunately, over recent years, have become fewer and fewer in the housing sector, and which, in particular, often cannot afford to endure the costs, delays and uncertainty associated with applying for planning permission.

As we build more homes and support homebuyers, we want to ensure that existing housing is managed fairly. The Bill will do something that many tenants and landlords have been calling for for many years. It will take action to crack down on the rogue landlords who can make tenants' lives a misery and who blacken the reputation of the great majority of responsible landlords. We will establish a database of rogue landlords and letting agents to help councils to tackle problems in their area, to extend fines for serious breaches of the law and to ban prolific offenders who put the lives of their tenants in danger.

Britain has come a long way in the past five years. Halfway through what the Prime Minister has called the turnaround decade, we have gone from having the biggest budget deficit in the developed world to the prospect of a budget surplus. We have more people working than ever before in our history. We have put the housing market crash behind us and Britain is building again. We have much further to go, however. Providing the homes that our country needs is a defining challenge for all of us in this House. The Bill advances us towards that goal: it is a plan for more homes and more homeowners; a plan that the country voted for six months ago in the general election; a plan that we are now putting into effect; and a plan that offers the next generation what previous generations have been able to look forward to—a home of their own. I commend it to the House.

4.23 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and add:

"this House, whilst affirming its support for helping more people, particularly young people, to own their own homes and welcoming measures in the Bill that restrict the operation of rogue private landlords and letting agents, declines to give a Second Reading to the Housing and Planning Bill because the Bill will not help most people struggling to buy their own home, will mean a severe loss of affordable homes for local communities across England, will centralise significant powers in the hands of the Secretary of State and deprive councils of the capacity to meet the housing needs of their communities and local people of a proper say in the planning process, and will weaken the obligation of private developers to contribute towards affordable homes for local people.

After five years of failure on housing under Conservative Ministers, we desperately needed a Bill to give people who have been hit by the cost of housing crisis some hope that things will change. This is not that Bill.

There are some parts of the Bill that we welcome, but I have to say that they are few and far between. We welcome steps to control the worst private landlords, to help young people get their first foot in the housing market, and to speed up compulsory purchase. We aim to make those steps much stronger as the Bill goes through Parliament. However, if you are a young person or a family earning an ordinary income and trying to get on, then this is a bad Bill. If you want to buy your own home, then these so-called starter homes are a non-starter for you, and they are unaffordable to most people on average incomes. If you are a working family on modest wages in a council or housing association home, then you face your rent being hiked as a result of the Bill. If you are worried about rising rents and insecurity in your private rented home—one in four families with kids in England now brings them up in private rented accommodation—this Bill does nothing for you.

Joan Ryan: Average rents in Enfield now consume 46% of average weekly income, which is unsustainable for families. We need an increase in affordable homes. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, unless it is significantly amended, the Bill will lead to a decrease in affordable homes and do nothing to help those families?

John Healey: My right hon. Friend is right. The Bill will lead to a decrease in the number of affordable rented homes, as well as affordable homes to buy, and to a huge loss in such numbers, particularly in areas such as Enfield. She is right to point to the problem that those in private rented accommodation now face with ever-rising rents, but if she looks at the Conservative manifesto, she will not find a single word about the millions of people who face spending their whole lives in private rented accommodation. That is why the Bill does so little for them and is such a big missed opportunity.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I was intrigued when I listened to the email that was read out earlier. The other night a young woman who lives in private rented accommodation came to see me. Does she not have the same aspiration to own her own home? Why can we sell off only council and housing association houses? Why is the private rented sector completely protected in the Bill?

John Healey: The real weakness in the private rented sector is that people who rent their homes from private landlords have so little protection, so few rights, and so little basic redress when their landlord does not do what they should as part of their obligations.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I want to respond to the right hon. Gentleman's point about affordability. The fundamental fact is that rents and house prices will be made more affordable by an increase in supply. That is the one thing that will decrease prices, and that is at the heart of the Bill.

John Healey: The hon. Gentleman is right, but perhaps he should address his remarks to the Secretary of State. In the previous Government the Tories built the smallest number of affordable homes in this country for more than two decades—10,920 affordable homes for social rent. That compares with three times that number in the last year of the last Labour Government which, incidentally, was when I was Housing Minister.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): Surely the right hon. Gentleman would concede that this time five years ago he was making the same arguments against the affordable homes regime, which has given more financial autonomy and authority to registered providers, and delivered 260,000 affordable homes.

John Healey: It is quite the contrary. I was a strong supporter of the affordable homes programme, and I negotiated with the rest of the Government an unprecedented switch of £1.5 billion from other Departments so that we could build more genuinely affordable rented homes to help bring the country through the recession. If the hon. Gentleman looks at his Government's record, he will see that eight out of 10 of the affordable homes for social rent that they claim they have built were started and funded through decisions that I made as Labour's last Housing Minister.

Mr Prisk: Given the ownership that the right hon. Gentleman claims on this issue, does he regret the loss of 440,000 affordable homes under the previous Labour Government?

John Healey: I regret that—just as in the last five years of this Government—we did not do enough to ensure that when council homes were sold, there was enough funding to ensure that they could be replaced fully, one for one, like for like, and in the area in which they were lost. That big flaw in this Bill will become more and more exposed in every area, including in the constituencies of Conservative Members, in each of the next five years.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): While the right hon. Gentleman is on the subject of regrets, let me mention Babergh, the main district in my constituency, where between 1997 and 2007 house prices increased by 200% on a sea of badly regulated mortgages, which led to an inevitable crash and a very deep recession? Does he regret the credit crunch, the excessive lending and the poor regulation that caused the affordability crisis we have today?

John Healey: There were failings in the way banks and the financial services were regulated in this country and every other developed country. What I do regret is that perhaps our Ministers listened too hard to the Conservative party, which was urging us to cut the regulation of the banking sector. What I am proud of is that when that deep economic recession hit, driven by the global banking crisis, ours was a Government prepared to step in to try to help the country through that deep recession—to help people stay in jobs, to help businesses keep going, and to help people stay in their own homes. I was proud to play a part in that with a £4 billion affordable housing programme building the affordable homes to rent and buy that people needed across the country—£4 billion in 2009-10 cut under this Government to less than two thirds of a billion pounds.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): One of the first acts of the Conservative-Liberal coalition when it came into power was to scrap the home start scheme which had the aim of keeping us building homes, instead of seeing them stalled because of the lack of backing from the banks. Fewer homes were repossessed during the deepest recession we had had in nearly a century compared with any recession under the Tories.

John Healey: My hon. Friend and I worked very closely on this and he is right. The kick-start programme of putting public money into re-starting building on sites that were stalled because of the deep global banking crisis and recession was part of building the homes we needed and creating the jobs we needed, and because we also insisted on apprenticeships in return for that support, we got more apprenticeships across the country. In terms of the mortgage rescue scheme, my hon. Friend will remember that in the last Tory recession of 1991 they put nothing in place. They were not concerned about homeowners who were faced with the repossession of their homes, and despite a much deeper recession and much more serious economic problems, our mortgage rescue scheme meant that more than a third fewer people than in the 1991 recession had to lose their homes and lose the basis on which they were building their lives.

Andy Slaughter: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the common thread running through this Bill is an attack on social housing which will exacerbate the social cleansing the Tories are carrying out in London in particular? The so-called starter homes programme will, in the words of Shelter, help only

"those already earning high salaries who should be able to afford"

a home on the open market. A £450,000 home is not an affordable home.

John Healey: My hon. Friend anticipates one of my main criticisms of the Bill. He also anticipates one of the major criticisms of many people who have taken what Conservative Ministers said at face value, because the more they look the less they will like what they see, and the more they look the less they will see support for them and their aspirations in future.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): According to the Government's own figures, with 200 right to buys being sold in Brent and replacement starts at zero, we are already in a deficit of 200 homes. With £450,000 being 20 times the average salary in Brent, does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to start building genuinely affordable homes for less than £450,000 as soon as possible?

John Healey: My hon. Friend is right. In truth the scale and cost of the housing crisis we face in this country requires every part of the housing sector, from private house builders to housing associations to councils, to do a great deal more, and we need more homes of all types, including social rented homes. The fundamental flaw with this Bill and this Government's plans is that they put all the chips on starter homes and on home ownership. I am going to come on to why this is such a mistake for the homes we need in the future.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend concerned, as I am, that smaller housing associations are already beginning to streamline their programmes? For example, 150 households in Tower Hamlets, mainly consisting of key workers, have been told by East Thames housing that they are on intermediate market rent schemes and must either express an interest to buy their homes within a week or face eviction within two weeks. Is not this an unforeseen consequence of the proposals? Will he ask the Government what plans they have to do something about those families?

John Healey: This is not an unforeseen consequence; it is the logical consequence of the Conservatives' policies in the Bill. The danger of giving housing associations this gung-ho freedom and creating a dash to build is that many longstanding housing associations—although not East Thames, which is relatively new—will see this as a green light to become almost indistinguishable from private developers. The big risk is that some of them will lose sight of their social mission and that their boards, trustees and directors will simply not be strong enough to represent their tenants' long-term interests or to ensure that we get the mix of homes we need.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in contrast to the consensual approach that the Secretary of State talks about, housing associations are suffering uncertainty about their assets and have had their so-called 10-year agreement on rent disrupted? Because they rely heavily on borrowing from the markets, some of them—including the Genesis housing association—are saying that they are not going to build any more affordable homes. Others are revising down the numbers that they were going to build. This is happening as a result of this Bill.

John Healey: My hon. Friend knows as much about this as anyone in the House, and in her characteristic way she has put her finger on a fundamental problem that the Secretary of State and his Ministers are now facing. It is a problem of trust. Just three years ago, councils and housing associations were given a 10-year guarantee on the rents that would be in place for them and the properties they manage, so that they could plan their businesses' development and maintenance. How can they now trust this Secretary of State and his Ministers to keep their word in the future? This is a serious problem for housing associations. How can they trust a voluntary deal, the terms of which are not in the Bill? They have no guarantee that the Secretary of State or his successor will not welch on the deal, or that the

[John Healey]

Chancellor of the Exchequer will not march in with his big boots to override the Secretary of State. Unless the guarantees that they are seeking as a basis for this deal are placed in the legislation, I fear the worst for them.

Emily Thornberry: Does my right hon. Friend know—has the Secretary of State perhaps told us—what will happen to the 261 National Housing Federation members that are not represented in this deal?

John Healey: This is a problem. We are not being given the details of the so-called vote taken by housing associations to enter this voluntary deal. The deal does not reflect the majority, or certainly a large number, of associations, which did not respond or were not consulted. There are serious questions for the Secretary of State about this. Despite many of the housing associations saying that they do not want sign up to the deal—or not having said that they will do so—the Bill will nevertheless give regulators the power to enforce compliance by those housing associations on "home ownership" measures. How can we take at face value the words of Ministers about this being a voluntary deal for housing associations when behind it lies regulation that will enforce compliance? And if the right to buy is not put in place, what will happen to the tenants? The Secretary of State hardly mentioned them in his speech. How can there be a "right" to buy without the legislation to create that right? Without that legislation, and without giving tenants the ability to challenge landlords if they say no, this will not be a right to buy; it will be a right to beg to buy.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is a former Housing Minister, so he will be aware that housing association tenants, whether secure tenants or those on affordable rent tenancies, have significant statutory protection from eviction. I hope he will take the opportunity, in response to the intervention made by the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali), to say that housing association tenants cannot be evicted with two weeks' notice.

John Healey: I am a little surprised at that intervention, because the hon. Gentleman has had experience of serving on the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government. If he had listened harder to the point my hon. Friend made, he would know that she was talking about tenants who are on intermediate rents and who do not have the sort of protection and rights he claims they have. This is a real problem. This is a straw in the wind. This is potentially a sign of problems to come.

Ministers have spent the past Parliament blaming Labour, but they have their own track record now. The inescapable background to this Bill is that that record is one of five years of failure on every front. The Secretary of State devoted most of his speech to home ownership, but that fell each and every year in the last Parliament—each and every year since 2010. It is at its lowest level for a generation. The number of home-owning households reduced by 200,000 under that Government, whereas it increased by more than 1 million under the Labour Government before them.

Greg Clark: Does the right hon. Gentleman still take the view that the fall in home ownership is not a bad thing? That is what he said when he was Housing Minister.

John Healey: Oh dear, Madam Deputy Speaker! Is that really the best the Secretary of State can do? In 2009, when I was Labour's Housing Minister, we were struggling with the deepest recession, following the global financial crisis. I was putting in place programmes to help lift the economy and, more importantly, to set up the mortgage rescue scheme, which helped homeowners who were struggling with their finances to stay in their homes. It will not wash to have the Secretary of State and Ministers continually coming back to what happened under Labour. They have had five years and it is their record. And on home ownership, young people have been hit the hardest. The number of young people owning their own home now has fallen by more than a fifth since 2010.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

John Healey: I am not going to give way, as I have given plenty of chances and I will give way later on. I am going to make some progress now.

While family incomes have stagnated, ever-rising private rents on new lettings are up by a fifth—by £1,600 a year—since 2010. Homelessness halved under Labour, but it is up by more than a third under the Tories, and it is rising rapidly. Housing benefit costs to the taxpayer have risen by almost £4.5 billion during the past five years, despite some punishing cuts for ordinary people, such as the bedroom tax. At the same time, housing investment was slashed.

On house building, I say to the Secretary of State that the House of Commons has confirmed to me that the last Government built fewer homes than any peacetime Government since Lloyd George's in the 1920s. *[Interruption.]* The Minister for Housing and Planning is chuntering away, but if he does not take this from the House of Commons, let me draw his attention to his own Department's statistics. The Department's live table 213 shows him that the lowest number of homes built under Labour was in 2009, when the figure was 124,980. That was at the depths, following the deepest economic crisis and recession for 100 years, but it was still higher than in 2014, the year in which the highest number of homes—117,720—were built under the Tories. They have had five years of failure on all fronts. This Bill does nothing to correct the causes of that failure, and in many areas it will make things much worse.

Let me turn now to the content of the Bill. *[Interruption.]* Well, I can certainly stop taking interventions from hon. Members. That is what has held me up.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con) *rose—*

John Healey: No, I will not give way, as it is clear that the hon. Gentleman's colleagues want me to carry on.

Young people and families on ordinary incomes face a cost-of-housing crisis. The need for affordable homes has never been greater. This Bill sounds the death knell for our ability to build the affordable homes to rent and buy that are so badly needed in urban and rural areas alike. It strangles the ability and the obligation of the public and private sectors to build affordable homes.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that shared ownership is one of the most affordable options for low and middle-income families? Indeed, Shelter says that 95% of those families would be able to afford a three-bedroom home with shared ownership. Does he agree that this Bill is a huge missed opportunity for a big shake-up in this area? It is exactly the sort of thing on which we should focus if we want more people to be able to own affordable homes in future.

John Healey: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When I talk about affordable homes to rent and to buy, I talk, in large part, about those shared ownership homes, which are often built because of obligations on developers, and often managed by housing associations, which will get choked off under this Bill. I will come to that point in a moment.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

John Healey: No.

Clauses 56 to 72 require the forced sell-off of affordable council homes to fund an extension of the right to buy to housing association homes. It is a power for the Chancellor to impose an annual levy on councils. Honestly, this is like some pre-Magna Carta monarch running short of cash for his exploits. There is no prospect and no plan for the proper replacement of these homes. There is no one-for-one, like-for-like replacement with new homes, and certainly not in the area where they are lost. This is unworkable and wrong, and we will oppose it.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): In York, we have more than 3,000 people who have the aspiration to rent homes from the council, and yet a city such as York, which is a high-value area, will have to sell about 1,500 of those homes. Are there not perverse financial incentives in the Bill?

John Healey: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. She has just heard me describe these provisions as unworkable and wrong. She has just heard me say that we will oppose them in the Division tonight, and we will challenge them at each stage of this Bill through Parliament. I hope that she will help my colleagues and I on the Front Bench do just that. The truth is that, in many areas of the country—both rural and urban, especially in London—the council homes that are flogged off will not go to families who are struggling to buy for the first time; they will go to speculators and to buy-to-let landlords. The greater the demand for affordable housing in an area and the higher the value of the houses, the more the Chancellor will take in his annual levy.

Sadiq Khan: Does my right hon. Friend not find it remarkable that, at a time when new homes being built in inner London are being bought by investors from overseas, this Government are forcing councils to sell off family homes to those very same foreign investors? That comes at a time when Londoners' need for affordable homes has never been greater.

John Healey: Indeed. My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point and speaks very powerfully for the capital. He speaks for the capital and for councils in areas that are led by Labour and by the Conservatives. London and places such as York, where there are high-value homes, are exactly the areas where councils will be forced to sell off houses. In Westminster, for instance, almost three quarters of council homes—nearly 9,000 of them—above the high-value threshold will have to be sold to pay for the policy not in Westminster or in London but across the country, in order to meet the Chancellor's and the Conservative party's manifesto pledge.

Andy Slaughter: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. In Hammersmith, the policy applies to 50% of homes—6,500 homes. In Kensington and Chelsea, it is 97% of the stock. Those areas are the most expensive in London and areas in which the crying need for affordable houses is the greatest.

John Healey: My guess is that the Conservative leaders of Kensington and Chelsea and of Westminster have had an influence on the Conservative leadership of the Local Government Association, because it has made it clear that it opposes the plan and it has warned of the consequences

"in particular on council waiting lists, homelessness and housing benefit."

Alongside this policy, clauses 3 to 6 overturn 25 years of planning law established by the Conservatives in 1990, with cross-party support, to require developers to help to provide affordable homes. So the very system of planning obligations that has delivered nearly 250,000 genuinely affordable homes to rent and to buy in the past decade will be set aside by Ministers imposing starter home obligations only. It is a field day for developers, and a dark day for families wanting to rent or buy an affordable home.

Mr Betts: Are not the legislative proposals on starter homes worrying for two reasons? Irrespective of the merits or otherwise of the starter homes, the provision will not add a single property to those being built over the course of this Parliament. Every property built as a starter home will replace a home that would have been built under section 106 obligations on an affordable basis. Secondly, this is an incredibly centralising measure under which central Government will dictate the details of planning permissions given on every site for which a local authority receives a planning application.

John Healey: My hon. Friend the Chair of the Select Committee is right on both counts. His Committee is conducting an inquiry into housing associations and I look forward to the report, as it will have great cross-party authority and will help this House and the other place to get to grips with what the Bill means for the future.

The Chartered Institute of Housing, the independent professional experts, says that this fire sale of affordable council homes to fund the extension of the right to buy could mean the loss of 195,000 genuinely affordable social rented homes in the next five years. Although housing associations might well build more homes as they sell under right to buy, many will increasingly build for open market sale and rent. Indeed, one third already say that they will no longer build any affordable homes. For organisations with a social mission that have played a big part in providing publicly funded homes for decades, that is almost as shocking as one third of NHS hospitals saying that they are prepared only to take private patients. The Bill is a milestone moment for affordable housing in this country and it is a massive step backwards.

[John Healey]

Let me turn to starter homes. We welcome the Government's stated aim of making home ownership more accessible to people on ordinary incomes and to young people in particular. The drop in home ownership over the past five years to its lowest level for a generation means that this is an essential element of meeting the country's housing needs and aspirations. But what is being done is not working, and these plans will do too little to help. We need fresh thinking, radical ideas and a much wider public debate for the future, which is why I have commissioned Peter Redfern, the chief executive of one of the country's largest house builders, Taylor Wimpey, to undertake an independent review of the decline in home ownership, supported by an expert panel of major figures in housing and economics.

The Secretary of State must face the fact that the Government's starter homes will simply not be affordable and will be a non-starter for families on ordinary incomes. Shelter calculates that across the country a person will need an income of £50,000 a year and a deposit of £40,000 to afford a starter home while in London they would need an income of £77,000 a year and a deposit of £98,000. That is simply out of reach for most of the middle-income working families who need help buying a home the most. Furthermore, there are no controls on the Bill to stop those who can afford to buy without help from the Government taking advantage of the scheme, so there is a big risk that the people who benefit most will be those who need the help least. As Shelter says of the starter homes programme:

> "The only group it appears to help on a significant scale will be those already earning high salaries who should be able to afford on the open market without Government assistance."

Let me say this:

> "When this was first put forward prior to the election, it was clearly intended to be focused on using that land that had not already been designated for housing. The aim was for it to be a brownfield 'exceptions' policy...which would be a welcome addition to existing affordable and other new housing. In the policy as now proposed, starter homes are clearly to be instead of, not additional to, affordable homes to rent".

Those are not my words but those of the previous permanent secretary of the Department for Communities and Local Government, Bob Kerslake—Lord Kerslake. The Government's own impact assessment confirms this:

> "Starter Homes will not be additional to housing supply"—

the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts). So before this Bill goes through the House, the Government must, as a minimum, change it to do two things. First, they must make any starter homes built through developer obligations additional to affordable homes, not a substitute. Secondly, they must put in place a guarantee and a guard against any abuse or dead-weight in the scheme.

Let me touch on planning—parts 6 and 7 of the Bill. With Ministers in a political panic about falling so far short of the new build numbers that they have pledged, this Bill gives them wide-ranging powers to impose new house building and override local community concerns and local plans. With a total of 32 new housing and planning powers for the centre, this legislation signals the end of localism. We welcome the measures to speed up the planning process where there is a clear case for doing so and where local decision making is not ignored, but there are serious concerns about some aspects of this Bill that will be shared in all parts of the House. I say that to the Housing and Planning Minister, who is chuntering again, because he might want to address them when he winds up. Those concerns are heightened, first, by the fact that there has been no consultation on the most radical of these planning proposals; and secondly, by the fact that so much is left as open-ended powers for the Secretary of State.

Clauses 3, 4, 97, 102 and 107 introduce very far-reaching changes. *[Interruption.]* Instead of laughing, I suggest that the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) looks at those five clauses. These far-reaching changes must be clarified and justified by the Secretary of State, and they should be restricted as the Bill goes through Parliament if they cannot be justified. In order to do so, will the Secretary of State guarantee, as he should, that the draft regulations are available to the House when these clauses are debated in the Public Bill Committee?

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that what the Bill looks to do, and what it will deliver, is to move on from the atrocious legacy that he left as Housing Minister, when he had just 88,000 home-building starts, followed by 95,000 over the last two years of the Labour Government—the lowest level since the 1920s? That is the legacy he left us with.

John Healey: No wonder the Minister's Back Benchers look so concerned, because this bluster—this promise of big housing numbers from which the Government are falling so far short—will not wash. He has his own track record. Never mind blaming Labour, never mind the previous Parliament: five years of failure on housing under Conservative Ministers is what he has to answer for. Moreover, he did not answer the important question for this House and for the public about the proper scrutiny of this Bill—that is, whether the draft regulations for these sweeping new planning powers will be available to the Public Bill Committee. He is nodding his head, but I am not sure whether that is a yes or a no. I will give way again if he would like to give us a yes or a no on the draft regulations.

Brandon Lewis: I am wondering whether the right hon. Gentleman is going to answer the question that I intervened on him to ask, which is whether he recognises that he left a legacy of just 88,000 starts—the lowest since the 1920s.

John Healey: Eight out of 10 of the genuinely affordable rented homes that the Minister claims credit for were started under Labour—commissioned under us and paid for with a commitment of investment under us.

Mr Jackson: The shadow Minister is extremely kind to give way. May I put to him a straightforward and honest question? Without the direct intervention of the Secretary of State, how would he deal with the situation where 35% of local planning authorities have not taken their plans through the whole system, and one in five has no land supply plans for the future? That is a major supply-side issue. How would his party deal with that?

John Healey: I will send the hon. Gentleman a copy of the Lyons report, which contains exactly the answer to that problem. The problem for him now is this: even where councils and local communities have local plans in place, the Secretary of State is taking powers under this Bill to override those—even when they have been consulted upon, agreed and put in place. That should worry the hon. Gentleman.

The Bill is an extraordinary personal and political retreat for the Secretary of State. He was Mr Localism—the Minister for city deals, the Minister who signed off the radical devolution of housing finances for councils in 2012. Now he is the Minister fronting this Bill with 32 new centralising powers and a legalised cash grab from councils for the Chancellor. He was Mr Moderate Centre Ground—the Conservative Minister with political roots in the old Social Democratic party, and the Minister who managed to strike a widely welcomed balance in the national planning policy framework in 2012 between the rights of local residents and the requirement to build more homes. Now he is the Minister explaining extreme plans that will all but end new affordable housing for social rent and overturn 25 years of planning law to let house builders completely off the hook over new affordable homes and mixed developments.

The Secretary of State was Mr Decency—the well-meaning Minister whom people felt they could deal with and trust. Now he is the Minister who would have known that the Office for National Statistics reclassification of housing associations was on the cards. He ducked the questions that I put to him earlier, but he encouraged housing associations to do the "voluntary" deal anyway. He is the Minister who, as the House has seen this afternoon, has to duck and dive to evade the truth that council and housing association homes sold off under this Bill will not be replaced one for one, like for like, let alone in the local areas in which they are lost.

However, I do have some sympathy for the Secretary of State.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Oh, no—don't.

John Healey: At the risk of disagreeing with my hon. Friend, I do have some sympathy for the Secretary of State. The Bill is driven by the politics of the Conservative party, not the housing needs of the country, and it is not really his Bill. Like the cut to tax credits, this Bill is the Chancellor's work, with his political fingerprints all over it. It is a Bill that makes the same mistakes as tax credits—divide-and-rule politics overriding good policy; and like tax credits, it faces a looming row on all fronts. Above all, it fails the same low and middle-income working families that the Tories claim they will represent. It will lead to a huge loss of affordable homes to rent and buy, and be a huge let-down to those who believed the Tory election pledges. The Bill will prove to be bad policy and bad politics. It will be a slow-burn problem all the way to 2020, and we will oppose it in the Lobby tonight.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. There are 55 Members who wish to speak in the debate. I will start with a time limit of five minutes on all Back-Bench speeches. That does not include the SNP spokesperson, of course. If Members could keep interventions to a minimum if they wish to speak, we might get through the list. The more interventions there are, the less likely we are to get through the list.

5.4 pm

Dame Angela Watkinson (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall be quick.

This Bill has many excellent provisions that will improve the availability, quality and accessibility of housing, but I shall concentrate my remarks on a narrow aspect of its provisions, as set out in clause 22. This clause, in chapter 3, relates to rogue landlords who break the law, treat their tenants badly and do not maintain their properties in a habitable condition. The clause states that the

> "Secretary of State must establish and operate a database of rogue landlords",

and that it will

> "give local housing authorities in England responsibility for maintaining the content of the database."

There is no doubt that such information is necessary for the protection of tenants and the reputation of private sector landlords in general. It would be a useful tool for local authorities in carrying out their housing and other functions. However, as local authorities do not know which properties in their areas are rented privately, or who or where the landlords are, it would be difficult to compile such a register, except after the event when a rogue landlord has been brought to their attention.

A simple, low-cost method of acquiring the necessary information would be to add a question to council tax registration forms seeking information about the owner of the property. That is proposed in my private Member's Bill, the Local Government Finance (Tenure Information) Bill. The proposal would facilitate the implementation of clause 22 by providing a database of privately rented properties and landlords from which to root out the unscrupulous ones. The information would be readily available for the effective enforcement of existing regulations affecting the private rented sector and the taxation of landlords. It would help with housing-related issues, such as investigating illegal sub-letting, unregulated houses in multiple occupation and benefit fraud, as well as planning enforcement and public health issues. It would help the police when criminal offences are committed, and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs when rental income is not being declared for taxation purposes.

Councils may add such a question already, but they are not required to do so. In the past, a voluntary national register of landlords has been considered. I suggest that that would not work, because only the good landlords would comply, even if there are sanctions for non-registration. A register of good landlords would leave us no further forward in finding the minority of landlords who are operating under the radar and causing misery to their tenants. Registration costs would inevitably be passed on to tenants. In 2009, an impact assessment of a full licensing scheme for landlords found that it would be onerous, difficult and costly. Where licences were used, the results were patchy.

With the private rented sector increasing in size, it is important to seek a workable solution to offer tenants greater protection against rogue landlords. Over 4 million households were renting privately in 2013-14. While the

[Dame Angela Watkinson]

majority of private sector tenants are satisfied with their homes, driving up standards can progress only if privately rented homes and their landlords are identified. An estimated one third of privately rented homes do not meet decent homes criteria, and one in six present a threat to health or safety. Conditions such as damp, unsafe electrical and gas appliances, lack of insulation, leaky plumbing, faulty fire alarms and vermin are all examples of how some properties do not meet decent homes criteria.

Local authorities lack the capacity or resources to inspect and enforce effectively and widely on issues relating to the private rented sector. Readily available information on the owners of privately rented properties in their areas would enable local authorities to target their finite resources on troublesome tenanted addresses via the Land Registry. The register required by clause 22 has been welcomed by Citizens Advice and the Residential Landlords Association, which is rightly jealous of its good reputation. The simplest method of collecting such information about the tenure of properties and the identity of rogue landlords would be by putting an additional question on council tax registration forms. I shall table an amendment to the Bill to that effect, and I hope it will find favour as the Bill progresses.

5.9 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to participate in this debate, which is the first to be classified under English votes for English laws. Further to the points of order raised by my hon. Friends earlier, I want to draw hon. Members' attention to a quote in a Library briefing paper. The quote is from a debt management expert, who said that having a lower asset base could see some housing associations "pushed towards insolvency". Given that some housing associations work on a cross-border basis, it is clear that the Bill may have some indirect consequences for Scotland. I am not challenging the certification, but I wanted to draw to hon. Members' attention to the fact that classification under EVEL has complications.

My contribution will look at the different approaches of the Scottish Government and the UK Government, which I hope will benefit Members on both sides of the House. A key omission from the Bill is that it does nothing proactively to tackle homelessness. Scotland has brought in what has been accepted as world-leading legislation on homelessness. Since 2012, anybody in Scotland who has been classed as "unintentionally homeless" has had a legal right to be housed. As a former councillor, I have seen the benefits of that legislation and the number of people who have been rehoused under it over the years. That shows that that legislation is working.

A key aspect of the Bill is the right to buy for social housing. That subject will clearly form a lot of today's debate. Hon. Members in this House need to have a long think about what is in front of them. Last week when I contributed to the tax credits debate, I commented that right to buy is a taxpayer subsidy. Later, a Government Member suggested that the SNP was against home ownership. That could not be further from the truth. In Scotland, the SNP Government have had a help to buy scheme that has helped up to 14,000 buyers enter the private housing market. At the same time, we have been funding social housing and new council housing. Home ownership and social housing are therefore not mutually exclusive. Sometimes, the debate in this place is too polarised and makes out that people are either for home ownership or against it. That is not the way it should be.

John Healey: The hon. Gentleman has given a list of the SNP Government's record, but how does he explain the fact that after eight years of that Government, more than 150,000 people are still on council waiting lists and half of all homes in Scotland still fall short of the official quality standards?

Alan Brown: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong about the quality standard. In my local authority, all houses, bar a few that have exemptions, meet the quality standard in Scotland.

In Scotland, we have built nearly 6,000 council houses in the same period that Labour built six. The records of the SNP and Labour are incomparable. There might still be people on council house waiting lists, but by building many more houses than Labour did, we are clearly moving in the right direction to tackle that.

In this Parliament, 30,000 affordable homes will have been built in Scotland under the SNP Government. We are aiming to increase that to 50,000 in the next term. We are certainly doing our best to tackle housing waiting lists.

In my opinion, right to buy has had its time. In Scotland, the SNP Government have legislated to take it away for council houses. That has clearly had an impact on waiting lists in Scotland, which the shadow Minister talked about, because it allows greater stock retention.

Government Members have been shouting about home ownership. As a point of interest, my parents bought their council house under right to buy, so I know that people have benefited from it and I have seen what happens. People who buy their homes take pride in them. I know that that has happened over the years. The policy was right at the time, but we now see the problems that have arisen. Initially, all the money went to central Government and was not used for stock replacement. That is why we have the problems that we have today.

In many areas, large family houses have all but disappeared from the stock because of the right to buy. As we have heard, it has led to an increase in private renting to compensate for the lack of social housing. That drives up housing benefit costs. It is therefore counterproductive to extend the right to buy to social landlords, because it will keep that vicious circle going.

A study by Glasgow University estimated that the right to buy cost £3 million a year in Renfrewshire in extra housing benefit. The same is true in England, where up to 40% of the flats that were sold under right to buy are now in the buy-to-let market. This is a UK-wide issue and it will only get worse with the proposed extension of the right to buy to social housing.

Another unintended consequence of the previous right-to-buy policy is that couples who bought their houses many years ago, including my parents, might end up living in a house that is unsuitable for their needs when they are elderly. There is a risk that people will be trapped in their houses because not enough social housing is available for them to move to, or because priority for those new council houses that are being built is given to people who already live in council houses so that there is a through flow. Houses are not always suitable for the needs of the people who stay in them.

As a councillor, I have also seen unintended consequences relating to the common repairs to, and upgrades of, tenement properties. When people buy such properties, the title deeds say that they are responsible for shared repairs and other upgrades. That all seems fine when they sign on the dotted line, but people often object when councils want to do work to the property. That is a particularly big problem with buy-to-let landlords who take over properties, because all they want is a return on their money. They do not want to shell out any more money than they need to, so they obstruct upgrades to properties. Some housing schemes whose properties require external rendering are left with a patchwork-quilt effect because private owners and buy-to-let landlords will not pay the money for the upgrades.

I have highlighted some of the problems that I have seen as a result of the right to buy council stock. Why would we want to repeat the exercise with social landlords? The Secretary of State keeps mentioning one-for-one replacement, but that proposal is as flawed as the maths accompanying the policy.

It is estimated that the right-to-buy discount payable to housing associations will be £10 billion to £12 billion. This is another area where the debate can be too polarised. The Government propose to cut £12 billion from the welfare budget—we have had a debate about tax credits—yet at the same time they want to make available a £10 billion to £12 billion taxpayer subsidy for people to buy the homes in which they already live. I ask Members to think of the difference that money would make if it were put directly into house building. It would create more homes, help drive down the cost of private renting and create more jobs. Those homes would also be more energy efficient, which would help hard-pressed families make their budgets go further.

On the maths accompanying the policy, the property agent Savills reckons that the Government have overestimated the average house price value and, therefore, the income it will generate. Councils therefore face the risk of having to pay more money than they will recover.

It is also a flaw that there is no guideline on how the one-for-one replacement will be managed in terms of house type, and there is no absolute requirement to provide a replacement in the same area. The housing policies of councils and local housing associations should be based on need and demand, but under the Bill they will be target driven and replacements might not be built on a like-for-like basis. Family homes could be sold off and there is a risk that decisions will be fudged and that they will be replaced by smaller units. That does not do anything for long-term housing need.

Dawn Butler: Westminster City Council, which is next door to the Prime Minister's favourite borough, has a very wise leader who states that right to buy could wipe out swathes of social housing and that because of this Bill

"we will not be able to house the people that we need to house."

Alan Brown: That is the risk I am highlighting, so I completely agree with that intervention.

Despite the Government's bluster, if we look at the number of new build starts compared with the number of right-to-buy sales, we will see that their track record shows that one-for-one replacement has not worked. The SNP's record in Scotland shows that completion rates for both private and social housing are much higher than those for the UK as a whole.

As a councillor, I have seen the benefits of targeted council house building in a locally led strategy. I have seen brownfield regeneration, town centre living to encourage vibrancy on their peripheries and—this is important to me—special needs housing and housing designed for the elderly ambulant. Such house building can be life changing for the new tenants, and it is heart-warming to hear the stories. We can talk about statistics and targets, but behind them there are real people and families who need houses. That is the most important thing. Another indirect consequence of a better housing strategy would be the health benefits—less bed-blocking ultimately means NHS savings—while more energy-efficient homes lead to healthier, wealthier families.

As I said, social housing will reduce housing benefit costs, so we would greatly appreciate it if the Minister could consider devolving housing benefit in the Scotland Bill, as it would give the Scottish Government the risk and the reward in terms of house building. If we built more houses, we could reduce housing benefit and get more money back to recirculate. I would appreciate it, therefore, if he had a word with the Secretary of State for Scotland.

It is ironic that housing associations were originally seen as an ideal mechanism for keeping debt off the national balance sheet. We have already mentioned the ONS reclassification and the fact that this could become public debt. The Conservatives have argued that we need to reduce the debt in order to save future generations—it is the argument for cutting welfare—so it seems strange that a central plank of their strategy is to use taxpayers' money to help people to buy their properties while forcing additional lending on to councils so that they can build replacement homes. Some of the economics do not add up, so I ask the Government to think again.

5.21 pm

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): As Mayor, my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has overseen the building of 100,000 affordable homes in London, which is 25,000 more than his predecessor.

Dawn Butler *rose—*

Zac Goldsmith: I will not give way, because we all have very little time. I will perhaps give way later.

As my hon. Friend will no doubt acknowledge when he speaks later, the gap between supply and demand remains very wide, and without radical action, it will grow wider still, further pricing Londoners out of their own city. Few people doubt that London is the greatest city on earth—it is why so many people want to come here—but that success, much of it down to his great work, is compounding—

Sadiq Khan *rose—*

Zac Goldsmith: I feel obliged to take an intervention from the right hon. Gentleman.

Sadiq Khan: Does the hon. Gentleman think the Mayor has made any errors on housing over the last seven years?

Zac Goldsmith: He has overseen the building of 100,000 affordable homes, which is 25,000 more than his predecessor. That is his record. What is more, he has laid the groundwork for a much more ambitious project, as I shall briefly explain later.

As a result of London's success, our population is expected to grow by 1.5 million over the next 15 years—that is 1.5 million people who will need homes in this city. Already, the average first-time home costs £412,000, which is 12 times the average inner-London wage. Closing the gap between supply and demand, therefore, is the absolute priority, but we know we can do it. We have the tools: the planning system, the finance and the land. There are vast swathes of public sector brownfield land that we can unlock. Transport for London alone owns the equivalent of 16 Hyde parks. We will have to unlock that land to build the homes Londoners need. We also have an opportunity to redevelop existing sites—for example, 1950s estates that are at the end of their lives but for which the opportunities are vast, as long as we get the consent of the residents.

The Bill is just part of the story, and no one here pretends that it is the solution to London's housing crisis, but it will give many people a chance to own their own home. It will give 440,000 housing association tenants in London the right to buy. One in 10 London families will have the right to purchase their home at a discount funded through the sale of high-value council homes.

So, in principle, I strongly support the Bill. I stood, as did all my hon. Friends, on a manifesto that committed us to help introduce it. There is no doubt, however—I believe that the Government Front-Bench team accept this—that the Bill needs amending. Council homes in London are far more valuable than they are elsewhere, and without a change we will see a disproportionate flow of resources out of London. I want to amend the Bill to guarantee that it works for Londoners.

We should extend the right to buy, but at the same time we must gain a significant number of low-cost homes, which we know is possible. The amendment that I intend to table after today's debate will ask for a binding guarantee that London will see a net gain in affordable housing as a consequence of this policy—a guarantee that London will see, in addition to the replaced housing association homes, at least two low-cost homes built for every single high-value home sold. That is the intent behind the amendment, and I believe it will gain the support of every single Back-Bench Conservative colleague representing a London constituency. I strongly urge the Government to work with us to help us deliver the commitments we need.

As well as pressing for this binding commitment, I want to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for securing a voluntary deal with the housing associations. Right to buy will channel a significant amount of cash into London's housing associations. Indeed, Standard & Poor's has said that their credit ratings are likely to improve.

Last week, I wrote to David Montague, chief executive of g15, which represents London's largest associations. I asked him how we can work together to turn that cash into new low-cost homes. It is very clear from his response that g15 is well up for that challenge. In a note to me last Friday, it has committed to more than doubling its investment programme, as long as the next Mayor works with the current Government and ensures that the brownfield land I mentioned earlier is freed up. If I am successful in the election for Mayor in May, I absolutely make that commitment to do so, working on the legacy of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip.

If we get this right, London will see a significant net gain in affordable homes from this policy, with two low-cost homes built for every one high-value council house sold, plus a commitment from London's housing associations to more than replace every home sold under right to buy. That is a deal that even the Opposition could support, if they could just briefly resist the temptation to wave flags during this debate.

I am conscious of the time limits, so I shall be brief on the further measures contained in the Bill. I strongly welcome the Government's commitment to starter homes, which will no doubt help a lot of people. It needs to work for Londoners, however, and a 20% discount on a £450,000 home in London is still out of reach for many people. The bottom line is that we are going to have to use every single available lever to deliver affordable homes at all incomes.

Finally, the aspiration of homeownership must not blind us to the difficulties of the millions of people who are renting, so I warmly welcome plans to crack down on rogue landlords. This will complement the current Mayor's London rental standards, and is yet another example of a Conservative Government working with a Conservative Mayor and delivering for Londoners.

5.28 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I shall begin with the aspects of the Bill with which I agree. There are some measures on the private rented sector that I can support, not least because the proposals on fixed penalty notices are an easier way to deal with landlords who are misbehaving in certain circumstances, and the rent repayment orders were recommendations of the Select Committee, as set out in its report during the last Parliament.

I am sorry that the Government have not gone further in dealing with the continuing problem of the very short tenures that most people in the private rented sector have or with the problem of the lack of resources of local authorities. The Government ought to consider allowing local authorities to keep fines that are levied on landlords, so as to help pay the cost of prosecuting those landlords who behave badly and bring the whole sector into disrepute. I hope that the Government will consider placing in the Bill a measure to ensure five-yearly checks on electrical safety in homes. The Government could achieve that very easily and it would help greatly.

On affordable housing, my great worry about the Bill is that if we are to achieve the 200,000 homes a year that the Government aspire to building—or the 250,000-plus homes that we really need—it can be done only through a serious long-term plan to build social housing for rent in this country. There has been a long-term decline in house building because that whole sector has diminished. What concerns me is that measures in the Bill will lead to the building of fewer houses at rents that people can afford, and that by the end of the current Parliament in 2020 there will be fewer homes to rent than there were in 2015.

Let us consider some of those measures. First, let us consider the right to buy. It is possible that some housing associations, if they chose—and it will be a choice—could replace properties on a like-for-like basis in their localities, although that would depend very much on their circumstances, but no information that I have seen, from Ministers or from anyone else, has persuaded me that local authorities have any chance of replacing the properties that they will have to sell off on a like-for-like basis in their localities. I am sure that the Select Committee will explore that issue further. It will be very interesting if Ministers are able to provide the Committee with evidence.

The starter home measures also present problems and challenges, because they do not propose the building of a single new home. Every starter home will be built in place of the affordable home that would otherwise be built under the current section 106 arrangements. In the last 10 years, nearly a quarter of a million homes have been built for housing associations as a result of section 106 agreements, but no more will be built during this Parliament. There will be starter homes costing up to £450,000, but a whole range of homes for affordable rents will not now be built.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Betts: I will give way once, because the hon. Gentleman is a member of the Select Committee.

Kevin Hollinrake: What does the hon. Gentleman make of the comments of the chief executive of the National Housing Federation, who has said that

"our offer to the government will see an increase in the number of new homes built"

and will

"ease pressure in all parts of the market"?

Mr Betts: David Orr, who gave evidence to the Select Committee the other day, said that he believed that more homes would be built as a result of the right-to-buy proposals, but also said that the federation did not support the proposals to force a sell-off of council homes to pay for them. He made that very clear. The federation also came out very strongly against the changes in rent levels which the Chancellor introduced in his Budget, and which will cause significant reductions in the number of homes that can be built by both local authorities and housing associations. As a result of these measures, Sheffield county council will lose £27 million of revenue from its housing account and South Yorkshire housing association will lose £7 million over the current Parliament.

The other day, in the Chamber, I congratulated the Secretary of State on his decentralisation proposals, but another key problem with the Bill is that it is very centralist. The starter homes programme involves micromanaged section 106 agreements. Local authorities currently do a deal on each individual site, but decisions on what homes should be built on each site will now be imposed from the centre. Moreover, planning permissions for building on brownfield sites will be given automatically, and local authorities will not have the right to negotiate infrastructure deals as part of those permissions. In the case of major infrastructure projects, it will be possible for housing to be approved with no local consent whatsoever. The Royal Town Planning Institute has said that

"the increase in the powers of Whitehall through these measures is extraordinary."

Control of total rents, control of the rents paid by so-called high-income families, and controls forcing local authorities to sell off properties will mean that the housing revenue account—a stand-alone account that was introduced by the Secretary of State when he was a junior Minister a few years ago—is now very firmly in the Chancellor's pocket.

Let me make two final points. Can anyone seriously believe that homes costing £450,000 are affordable, or that the income of a family in which two members are working hard and earning the living wage can be described as high, as it is in the Bill? Those two points alone show how out of touch the Government are, and how irrelevant these measures are to the real problems that face most people in this country.

5.34 pm

Mr Nick Hurd (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): It is a huge pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), who I dearly hope will be the next Mayor of London and will have the chance to build on the legacy of my parliamentary neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson).

I rise to seek reassurance on one central point. I support the principle of the Bill. It is designed to make it easier for people to own their home, to build their home and to have better protection from rogue landlords. It will have my support on Second Reading. However, I have a concern, which I would like those on the Government Front Bench to respond to, in relation to whether the Bill will lead to an increase in the supply of affordable homes in London across all tenures. As my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park said, that is the No. 1 political challenge we face in London.

I am a London MP. I represent an area where it is now almost impossible for someone to rent a one-bedroom flat for less than £1,000 a month, or to buy it for less than £250,000. Despite the best efforts of Hillingdon Council, which is as determined and as creative as any, most of what we see built in the area is what the market can pay rather than what the community needs, which is homes that young people and key workers can afford. The clear priority, therefore, is to increase the stock of affordable housing across all tenures. This goes to the heart of the kind of London that we should want to see and hand on to future generations. It must be a city in which people of all ages and incomes can live together in neighbourhoods that are not segregated by wealth, class or nationality.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Hurd: I do not have time to give way, as much as I love the hon. Lady.

As the Secretary of State was very clear in saying, successive Governments of all colours have failed the capital, but none more so than the 13 years under new Labour. The shadow Minister was good enough to express regret—no more—that in those 13 years we lost 400,000 units of affordable housing stock. That is the hole we are having to climb out off, and the Mayor of London deserves enormous credit for starting that process. This is the central prism through which I look at the Bill: will it contribute to the biggest political challenge of increasing the supply of affordable homes? I have to say that I have not yet received a clear enough answer to that question.

There are considerable grounds for optimism. The Secretary of State himself has made it clear today that he is passionate about putting London at the front of the surge in new build that we will see over the next five years. I believe him when he talks about one-for-one replacement. I see huge potential in the voluntary deal he has so cleverly struck with housing associations, but let us push those housing associations to be more ambitious. It is called right to buy, but for them it should also be sell to build. They have the capacity to do much better than one for one.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Hurd: I do not have any time to give way to my hon. Friend.

We should be pushing them to do better than one to one; we should be pushing and encouraging them to look at two for one.

I need reassurance on how money will be recycled from the sale of high-value council assets. I take great encouragement that the Government have overseen an escalation in the replacement ratios that had fallen and lagged so shamefully under Labour. There is still a question, however, about whether there is enough money to go around, given that most properties will be in London, to fund what we want to do: the discounts on right to buy, brownfield regeneration, and the replacement of the housing stock on an ambitious level. My original position was the same as the current Mayor of London, which is to argue for a ring-fencing of proceeds. I recognise, however, that that will raise substantial question marks about the integrity and validity of the policy. I support wholeheartedly the change, put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park, to make it clearer that the Bill will do what is needed to meet the big political challenge in London: to increase the supply of affordable homes and make this city the place that we continue to love to live in and work in.

5.38 pm

Sadiq Khan (Tooting) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), who, for the most part, made a very compelling speech. I rise to speak in an absolutely crucial debate for many Londoners. I commend the speeches from my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) on the Opposition Front Bench, and from my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee.

There is a housing crisis in London, with a growing shortage of affordable homes to buy and rent. Precious public services are struggling to attract and retain workers, and the city's businesses cite housing as their single biggest concern. Many Londoners are in distress over housing due to their inability to make any progress on a council housing waiting list or because of poor quality accommodation.

One of the biggest issues is the rising cost of housing to rent and buy, and for many Londoners, buying their own home is simply a pipe dream. The average deposit to buy a place—not the purchase price—is now £100,000. That is three times the median salary of someone in inner London, and four times the salary of someone in outer London. As a result, more and more Londoners have no choice but to rent, yet rents in London have now reached an all-time high of £1,300. Rents are rising year on year, and have risen by 38% since 2010. Housing benefit spend—essentially, the taxpayer making up the shortfall between what Londoners can afford to pay and what the market is charging—increased in London from £5.3 billion in 2010 to £6.1 billion now. Add to that the Government's welfare changes, the bedroom tax, cuts to tax credits and the lowering of the welfare cap, and that pretty toxic combination is hollowing out many inner-London boroughs. That is putting enormous strain on the social fabric of London, and increasing pressure on housing, transport and public services in many of London's outer suburbs.

Dawn Butler: Does my right hon. Friend agree with the senior Tory who says that the right to buy will wipe out swathes of social housing?

Sadiq Khan: The Conservative leader of Westminster Council was speaking on behalf of Londoners who care about London's social fabric and are worried about the hollowing out of our city—I wish that more Conservative Members would take up that debate. With the Bill, the Government have a real opportunity to start the process of solving this crisis, but they have flunked it. Instead of solutions, their proposals will make the problems even worse.

Let me turn to the extension of the right to buy to housing association tenants. Over recent years there has been no like-for-like replacement of affordable homes sold under the existing right-to-buy scheme. The Secretary of State could not dispute figures from his own Department that I put to him, which show that in London since 2012, only one in seven council homes sold have been replaced. How can anyone believe that it will be different this time? There is nothing in the Bill to guarantee that money must be reinvested in the local area, replacing like-for-like sold-off homes.

Some housing associations are relaxed about selling off homes in inner London and replacing them with units in cheaper parts of outer London or even further afield. That damages London's social mix, accelerating the exodus of poorer people out of our great city, and making the affordability crisis even worse. To make matters worse, the only way that the Government could fund this policy is by forcing councils to sell off the most expensive homes. In London, that means losing substantial amounts of affordable family homes, and the city's low and middle-income families will be squeezed out to fund the sell-off of housing association homes nationwide.

Together with colleagues from across the House who want to join me, I will be fighting to retain the money from housing association and council property sales in London for Londoners. There must also be provision for like-for-like replacements in the same areas as where the properties are sold

It is not as if the Government are planning a big boost in truly affordable homes. They have put all their eggs in the starter home basket, but in London starter homes simply will not help struggling first-time buyers. With starter homes capped at a cost of £450,000, someone with a 25% deposit—that, by the way, is £98,000—would need an income of £77,000 to afford one. The Secretary of State talks about aspiration, but who exactly is he talking about?

This Bill is a missed opportunity. It will not fix London's housing crisis; in fact it will make it worse. It will not deliver the genuinely affordable homes Londoners need to buy or rent. It will not help the councils and the Mayor to start to build the homes Londoners desperately need. It will not rein in spiralling rent rises for those in the private sector. It will not end the scandal of the homelessness problem.

Next May's mayoral election is a referendum on the capital's housing crisis. This Bill reinforces why that referendum cannot come soon enough.

5.45 pm

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), although I disagree with one of the last things he said: that this Government are putting all their eggs in the starter home basket. With respect, no they are not. The most exciting part of this Bill—one alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), but otherwise not mentioned at all by any of the six speakers in this debate, or the eight including the two Front Benchers—is chapter 2 on self-build and custom house building. The Bill amends the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, which was my private Member's Bill that I steered through Parliament and became law on 26 March. I have listened for several years now in this House to debates in which people from different sides have taken their part and shouted statistics at each other. I find it very frustrating, because the system has failed our constituents for at least 30 to 40 years, if not longer.

No one talks about a national chair crisis or a national shoe service to solve the problem we have with our shoes. No one says we need a help-to-sit campaign funded by Government so that we have enough chairs. That is because the supply of chairs and shoes rises to meet demand. The problem for 30 or 40 years—if not longer—is that the supply of houses has not risen to meet demand, and that is the problem we have to solve.

Some 1.2% of the land area of this country is taken up with houses. If we add in gardens, it is probably slightly over 2%. We could double the number of houses in this country, which no one is suggesting doing, and still 97.6% of the land area of the country would not be taken up houses.

Of the first six speakers from the Back Benches, four represent London constituencies. One might be forgiven for thinking that this is a debate about London, and no one denies that there are acute and special problems in London, but of the 65 million people who live in the United Kingdom, 57 million do not live in London and they also need to have their voice heard in this debate.

Richard Graham: Since my hon. Friend encouraged us who do not represent London to offer up our voices, may I point out to him that, just as he has his problems in his part of the country, we in Gloucester have ours, with not a single new unit of social housing built by Gloucester City Homes or the city council during the entire 13 years of the previous Labour Government?

Mr Bacon: That is a very disappointing statistic, but it reflects the central problem. We either have an assumption, as apparently many Opposition Members do, that housing has to be provided in a top-down way by large housing associations, often with chief executives on bloated salaries in excess of £300,000, or we assume that somehow the volume house builders will make up the difference. There is a wide-eyed astonishment among many people that volume house builders construct housing when, and only when, it is profitable for them to do so. What we actually need is to break open the choice for people—break open the supply if someone wants to get a piece of land and build their own house.

As anyone who is a subscriber to *Homebuilding & Renovating* magazine will know—and frankly everyone should be—the fact is that people can construct a very decent house, to very high thermal performance standards, which will cost nothing to heat, for £140,000 to £160,000.

Oliver Colvile: Does my hon. Friend agree that there are too few volume house builders and we need to have significantly more competition in the market?

Mr Bacon: Yes, there are far too few volume house builders. What we actually need is proper choice. I do not blame volume house builders for building when it is profitable to do so and not otherwise, but they can artificially restrict the supply of land and acquisition possibilities for others by not even buying the land, but by buying an option on the land. If they pay a farmer in my constituency £4,000 a year for 10 years for an option to buy the land, they can keep it off the market. The farmer can get 3.5 tonnes of winter barley or wheat off it so he is happy, and he gets the option money as well.

There is one thing that does not happen, however. A lady emailed me last year when my Bill was going through to say that she had spent five years looking for a piece of land, and that she was no further forward than she had been on the day she started. It seems as though, in this country, it will never be a middle-aged rite of passage to get a piece of land and build one's own house, as it is in Germany.

Catherine West: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Bacon: I cannot give way. I am so sorry; I would love to, but there is no more time.

Germany has 20 million more people than us and one third of its land area is covered by forest, yet anyone who wants to buy a piece of land there can go along to their local council and say, "I would like a piece of land, please." The reply will be, "Would you like a big one or a small one?" The smaller ones are disproportionately slightly subsidised by the big ones,

[Mr Bacon]

which are disproportionately slightly more expensive. There is an equilibrium between the supply of land and those who want to buy it, so anyone can get a piece of land.

I have mentioned the fact that it is possible to construct a house for between £140,000 and £160,000. Through the community land trusts scheme, it is possible to remove from the equation the actual value of the land. There are many landowners who would happily come forward to help in rural areas such as mine in Norfolk if they thought that the land was not going to be used by a volume house builder to build on spec and then sell. The very fact that people use the word "spec"—as in "speculative"—is quite extraordinary. I was sitting next to a representative of a major house builder at a dinner recently, and I said, "We don't talk about spec shoes or spec chairs. The very word 'spec' is pejorative. Why do you use it? Why aren't you loved? You provide the dwelling places where people live their lives, rear their children, conceive their children and bring about the next generation. Given what you do, why are you not loved? Why do you call it 'spec'?" He looked at me as though I was mad and said, "Well, I suppose we always have."

We need a revolution in how we do this, and my simple plan is to put the customer at the centre of the equation. I know that that is old-fashioned and traditional. It might even sound simple, but it works for shoes, it works for chairs and it works for most things. There are many good measures in the Bill that will help to promote supply, including the registration of brownfield land, the reduction of uncertainty in the planning process, the simplification of compulsory purchases and the speeding up of neighbourhood planning.

Many of those measures are welcome, but the most welcome aspect of the Bill is the opportunity provided in chapter 2 to make it easier for a person to get a piece of land and build a house on it. That could affect everyone. It could have huge benefits for social cohesion, for skills and even for the prevention of reoffending. Stella Clarke in the Community Self-Build Agency in Bristol is getting young black men who were rioting 20 years ago to literally build their own stake in the community. We need a revolution in this country, and it is this Government who are going to bring it about.

5.52 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon). Housing is the biggest issue in my constituency, as it is in many others. I want to focus on two points. First, I shall deal with the elements that I believe to be missing from the Bill; then I shall cover the elements of concern.

There is nothing in the Bill on leasehold reform. The hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) has been leading a campaign on this issue for some time. The Leasehold Knowledge Partnership has supplied a briefing outlining the key elements missing from the Bill. It states:

> "The law commission report proposing the replacement of forfeiture with a forced sale through the termination of a tenancy has been with government since 2006."

It goes on:

> "The government is aware that many leasehold landlords are delaying or stopping the 'right to manage' on very minor technical grounds".

It also states:

> "The basic right for leaseholders to form a Recognised Tenants Association is set at a needlessly high level".

Furthermore, the so-called informal disputes tribunal procedures are far from informal or inexpensive.

The Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) mentioned electrical safety checks. A briefing from Electrical Safety First states:

> "The Housing Bill…does not include anything on protecting tenants in the private rented sector from electrical accidents caused by unchecked and faulty electrical installations. Electrical safety in the private rented sector has been left behind other important safety areas, such as gas, carbon monoxide and smoke alarms."

As my hon. Friend said, the Government have missed the opportunity to introduce regulations as part of this legislation to ensure mandatory five-year electrical safety checks.

I have already raised with the Minister the question of registered social landlord ballot transfers from councils to housing associations, and the fact that there is no reversal provision. A housing association might make an offer to tenants and they might vote yes to stop the transfer, but if the offer falls through, the tenants are stuck with that housing association ad infinitum. There should be an opportunity at some point, perhaps after five or 10 years, for tenants to be re-balloted if they so wish, to give them a chance to change their housing provider or to go back to the council.

I shall speak briefly about elements of concern. Like many others who have spoken today, I find the deficiencies in the proposals on the right to buy a matter of huge concern. I support the principle of the right to buy. However, the House of Commons Library briefing paper states:

> "The ultimate aim is that replacement will be achieved within two years of sale, but the default position is that associations will achieve replacement within three years. Replacement will be at national level".

Replacement will not be at local level, as many colleagues have pointed out. The Library briefing goes on to say that local authorities would be required

> "to manage their housing assets more efficiently, with the most expensive properties sold off and replaced as they fall vacant."

In Tower Hamlets, there is not much property that is not at the higher value end. Those are large family homes, and when they go, families in east London will not be able to afford them. According to the briefing, the Local Government Association

> "has argued that the extension of Right to Buy should not be funded by forcing councils to sell off their homes."

Another aspect that has been highlighted locally is that housing associations are having to change the way in which they work. There have been reports of employment training programmes, youth services initiatives and antisocial behaviour efforts being subjected to review, reduced or cancelled as a result of cuts in funding. Some associations are even changing the housing that they offer. For example, East Thames housing has said:

> "We have had to review our housing offer in line with government changes, particularly the year on year rent cut, which will result in a £14m reduction to our annual income. We have therefore taken the decision to concentrate our resources on social housing for

those in greatest need, as well as shared ownership which is supported by the government. Unfortunately we can't continue to support and subsidise other tenures and believe those with the greatest need should be our priority."

That language seems not only innocuous but quite positive, if we want to interpret it in that way, but translated into English it means that key workers and carers are going to be evicted from their homes. They will no longer be able to use intermediate tenures. I am sure that that is not the Government's intention. It is totally wrong for people who have been living in those homes for 10 years to be evicted, and I would like the Minister to tell us that that is not the Government's intention and that affordable social housing for key workers is part of the plan.

5.57 pm

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Half of my exceptionally beautiful constituency consists of the South Downs national park. Much of the development is therefore forced outside the park, which rightly has high levels of landscape protection. This creates a great deal of pressure on the communities outside the park, and it is therefore unsurprising that planning matters are the single biggest issue in my constituency. That reflects the tension with which we as policy makers have to deal. On one hand, we must acknowledge that it is in the national interest to build more houses. The Secretary of State has rightly identified the fall in home ownership and the lack of affordable housing as a serious national problem—perhaps our most pressing one. On the other hand, we must also acknowledge that it is in the national interest to protect the countryside and our communities.

I agreed with a great deal of what my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) said, but the difference between the countryside and shoes is that the supply of land in the countryside has been deliberately constrained by planning legislation for a very good reason—namely, to prevent random development. The challenge for us is to find a way of increasing supply while protecting the countryside as far as possible.

Mr Bacon: I represent a rural constituency and I have yet to meet anyone who does not want to live in a house, even in a rural area. Is not the problem that people do not have enough of a voice in what gets built, where it is built, what it looks like and who gets the chance to live in it? If we can change all that, we can change the conversation about development and environmental protection.

Nick Herbert: I agree with my hon. Friend about that. People often have legitimate reasons for being concerned about development, but a silent group of voters, perhaps a majority, cannot get their foot on the property ladder—those who face high rents, for whom the dream of home ownership is a long way away—and we need to ensure that their interest is represented, too.

There is perhaps something of an ambivalence at the heart of government policy making now. We started off, rightly, with the Localism Bill, the theory being that we should devolve power to local communities and that would be a better way of incentivising house building. There is some evidence, particularly through neighbourhood planning, that that policy approach works, but more recent Bills have sought to take more powers to the centre as a means of driving through house building. That approach will not work, any more than it worked under the previous Government.

That policy ambivalence is perhaps reflected in a split personality on the part of the Government. Kindly Dr Jekyll rightly comes to the House to say that regional spatial strategies are to be scrapped, but at night the Treasury doors are unlocked and Mr Hyde emerges. He uses the Planning Inspectorate to drive up housing numbers, but that interference by the Planning Inspectorate can cause delays in the system, preventing plans from being completed. Kindly Dr Jekyll believes in neighbourhood planning and wants to speed it up, but evil Mr Hyde is allowing a system where speculative planning applications can be allowed against the wishes of local communities. Kindly Dr Jekyll remains committed to a plan-led system, but Mr Hyde, in this Bill, is allowing the Secretary of State to take powers to grant planning permission directly for major infrastructure projects and give permission in principle, perhaps not just on brownfield land, but for other sites too. We need clarity about that.

I suggest to Ministers that we need to address four issues if we want to encourage public support for house building rather than see continuing resistance. First, we need to keep faith in localism. Neighbourhood plans give people power and responsibility to determine what they want rather than what they do not want, and they have resulted in people electing to have more houses than expected. Secondly, people have legitimate concerns about the provision of infrastructure to support housing—not just major infrastructure, which is dealt with under this Bill, but local infrastructure. People need to be assured that there will be adequate school places, that GP waiting lists will not increase and that there will not be excessive traffic on their roads.

Thirdly, good design is at the heart of building public support for housing, and in that respect I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk about the value of "self-build". That perhaps wrongly suggests that people are going to be encouraged literally to build houses themselves; we are talking about opening up the market to a broader range of suppliers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State presided over the national planning policy framework, and we must recall that he explicitly said in his foreword that there were three dimensions to that framework: the social, the economic and the environmental. We must not lose sight of that environmental dimension as an important factor that the planning system must address.

Finally, we need to look at more fundamental barriers in our planning system, and again I find myself in agreement with my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk about that. There is a real question as to whether we will ever be able to build in the south-east at the rate that will be required to lower house prices and make housing more affordable. We face serious regional imbalances in this country, as much of the demand for housing is focused on areas in the south. We need to look more radically, not just at the rebalancing of the economy that is needed, but at the whole operation of the planning system, to ensure that it meets the needs of people and that housing can be made affordable for everyone.

6.4 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), who made some good points about the flaws in this Bill. The two boroughs that I represent parts of have 20,000 people each on the waiting list for a council home. My surgery is full every week of people seeking help with their housing needs. They come with harrowing accounts of homelessness and private sector evictions, overcrowding and damp. My local councils, Lambeth and Southwark, are each playing their part in delivering new homes at social rent. I would love to be able to say to my constituents, "I know things are really bad, but the Government are bringing in a new law that will help to deliver more genuinely affordable homes and although it will take some time, things will get better." I cannot tell them that, because the consequence of this Bill is that the new definition of an affordable home in London will be a home to buy at £450,000.

There is nothing in this Bill for people who are on a council waiting list, for those who are sleeping on their friend's sofa or for those who are bringing up their children in a one-bedroom flat when they desperately need three bedrooms. I agree that we should be building new homes to buy, but we cannot be meeting the housing aspirations of one part of our community while deliberately ignoring the needs of another part entirely—that is what this Bill does. Instead of providing for a mixed housing economy—more homes at social rent, intermediate rent and market rent, and more homes for shared ownership and homes to buy—this Bill will result in much-needed council homes being sold off to pay for housing association tenants to exercise the right to buy. Life for those in the most serious housing need and for many others, including junior doctors, teachers and many other vital public sector workers, will just get harder.

I find it astonishing that this Bill defines a household comprising two adults earning £20,000 each a year as "high earners". Bus drivers, bricklayers, carpenters, nurses and midwives will all be required to pay market rent under the "pay to stay" clause, but that is as much as double what they will be paying as social tenants and it is certainly not affordable in London. The solution to meeting our housing needs is to build more homes across a wide range of different tenures, not to price some of our most committed and hard-working tenants out of their homes by penalising them for getting a pay rise.

On the private rented sector, I welcome the measures to tackle irresponsible landlords, but they will not help my constituents Jason and Helen, who live with their two teenage daughters in a privately rented flat in Dorchester Court in Herne Hill. Jason is employed by his landlord as the gardener of the estate, and Helen is a teacher. They are facing eviction from their home because the landlord has put up the rent, without warning, to a level they cannot afford. Despite the fact that they have no rent arrears and they have been good tenants for 21 years, they have been served with a section 21 notice, under which the landlord does not have to give any reason for requiring them to move out. Until we have more secure forms of tenancy and checks on unreasonable rent increases, many residents will continue to live with the day-to-day insecurity of unpredictable rents and the threat of a no-fault eviction.

Finally, I am very concerned indeed about the planning aspects of this Bill. I am proud to have spent 18 years working as a town planner. What I loved most about the profession was the vital role that planning plays in brokering the space between individual interests and collective community need. The planning system allows communities to be involved in plan-making, in scrutinising and commenting on the detail of individual applications, and in ensuring good design quality and that good open spaces, school places and health centres are provided to support an expanding population. Good planning ensures that we meet our need for new homes and jobs in the short to medium term, while delivering really successful, sustainable places for the long term.

This Bill lacks any vision for planning, regarding it as simply a constraint to development. Through a multitude of different measures, including "in-principle" planning consent, the removal of the need for section 106 contributions from starter home developments and the provision for Secretary of State call-in of planning decisions, this Bill will take power away from our local communities, while also removing vital checks on the quality and sustainability of development. Local authorities will be denied the opportunity to ensure that new development meets local need and to negotiate for community facilities and affordable housing. Most importantly, communities will be denied the opportunity to shape their neighbourhoods. I am a supporter of neighbourhood planning, but what will be the point of a neighbourhood plan if the council has to grant in-principle consent and the Secretary of State will take many decisions personally in any event? I am clear that this centralisation of planning will prove to be profoundly difficult for many communities across the country and will ultimately lead to more not less delay in the planning system, as local residents protest, petition and judicially review.

In meeting our housing needs, we should regard planning as the essential toolkit to deliver high-quality, successful, diverse and attractive communities. The planning system should be where we hold, collectively, our aspirations for our communities in the future, and how we make sure that those aspirations are delivered. This Bill, as drafted, will do the opposite.

6.9 pm

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). She is a planner and I am a chartered surveyor, and I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

This is a broad and substantial Bill and it is difficult to do it justice in just five minutes. I preface my remarks by strongly commending the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon), who showed real passion and knowledge. He knows what he is talking about on the subject of custom and self-build homes, which is a very important part of this Bill.

Planning reform, help for tenants and a more professional rented sector are the topics on which I wish to focus. At the beginning of this debate, the Secretary of State rightly said that, for a quarter of a century, our housing markets have been dysfunctional. Year after year, we have been producing, roughly speaking, half the homes that we need. That persistent gap between demand and supply is at the root of almost every housing issue that we debate, including affordability, standards, homelessness, and the rising housing benefit bill. The acid test for this Bill, and for housing policy as a whole, rests on whether the Government will deliver a sustained increase in the supply of homes regardless of tenure.

I welcome the proposals on starter homes and on custom house building, but let me briefly turn to planning reform and offer one suggestion to Ministers. If the planning system is to work, we need to reverse the loss of experienced planning officers in our local authorities. In some authorities, the system is grinding to a halt because of the lack of planning officers able either to produce a local plan or to drive forward negotiations with experienced developers. I urge the Minister, in his reply to this debate, to bring together the planning profession and the industry—and say how he will do that—to secure a joint agreement on how we can strengthen planning departments and get the system moving.

My second issue is tenants, particularly those of houses in multiple occupation. I welcome this focus on HMOs. Many Members here will know that, sadly, these are often the properties run by the worst landlords. It is the sub-sector where, all too often, criminality and human trafficking lurk. That is why I strongly encourage Ministers to apply the provisions of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, so that the worst of the illegal HMOs are seized and their properties handed over to the local housing authorities for legitimate homes for families. That is the best signal that we can send to deter crooks from entering that market.

That leads me on to the wider issue of the private rented sector. As the Housing Minister, I launched the build-to-rent fund. I did so because we needed a more professional, long-term rented sector. We need to be building homes that add to the housing stock. I am talking about homes that are specifically designed to provide for tenants' needs. Attracting long-term institutional funding will mean longer tenancies, because such investors want fully occupied homes and satisfied customers.

It is a model of renting that is common in most advanced countries, particularly in most American cities. Here in London, as my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) knows, the Greater London Authority has backed the build-for-rent scheme, with supplementary planning guidance, which promotes discounted market rent to deliver appropriate affordable homes.

We are seeing authorities in London, including Labour authorities such as Greenwich, intelligently use this discounted market rent model, and I strongly encourage Ministers to adopt that process and to try to ensure that it is adopted nationally. Let me be clear, I am not against buy to let. I just think that it cannibalises the existing housing stock and it has reached a scale where it is crowding out home ownership, which cannot be right. Instead, we should be promoting a long-term, professional rented sector in which more homes are built to rent, and I hope Ministers will continue to promote the sector. Out of respect to those who have yet to speak, I shall draw my remarks to a close.

6.13 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): In a spirit of generosity, may I welcome the moves in the Bill towards self-build? When we see the markets in Scandinavia, Australia and the States, it is clear that we need to inject some energy into this idea of buying land to build a home. As the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk) said, in areas like London with lots of houses in multiple occupation, the banning orders and the regulation of some of our rogue landlords are very necessary.

Very sadly, I must say that this Bill is of deep, deep concern. At this critical junction for housing in our country, it is extraordinary that the Government should propose a Bill that will, in effect, see the decimation of social housing. I believe in mixed communities and I genuinely believe that some Government Members do too. I love the idea of the London in which my father arrived in the 1950s. By the late 1960s, he was able to buy his own home for £6,000 in Tottenham, and his sister, who arrived with him, was able to get a council house on the Croydon block of Broadwater Farm. Also at that time, we had a private rented sector. The sector was split into thirds.

The vast majority of Londoners moving into a home this year are in the private rented sector. There is nothing in this Bill to address the huge soaring rents—40% over two years in Richmond, 30% in Kingston and 20% in the London borough of Haringey. There is nothing for all those people who are struggling with their bills. They are paying, on average, 46% of their salaries on rent. If the Government believe in mixed communities, then please come to this House and say something about social rents, social housing and affordable housing. What we have is a Bill that will see the reduction in the number of those homes because of the money that will be taken from already cash-strapped councils. Of course this Bill is coming before the spending review in which yet more money will be taken from local authorities.

Let us think about the London that we will see. A starter home scheme will be exempt from section 106, so all the infrastructure that comes with housing—the schools, clinics, hospitals and children's centres—will not be there. With no community infrastructure levy in place, all the infrastructure will be gone. What kind of communities are we attempting to build here in London?

It feels as though the Secretary of State has his mind set on building Paris. Great! That will be an inner London of the very wealthy. All of us in this Chamber have assets and homes. Anyone who owns a home in London—certainly if it was bought 10 or 15 years ago—will find that it is worth well over £1 million. Then there will be those without assets, who will be condemned to the private rented sector. Why is that? It is because these new starter homes will not help them.

If someone is on a living wage in London, they cannot afford a starter home on this scheme. What is the point of talking about it? It is a waste of time. Effectively, it is a scheme for the middle class children, with a 20% discount. I came to this view when I ran for the nomination for London Mayor. I supported right to buy—it is right to be able to exercise that right—but there is a crisis here in London. We can forget the idea of one for one. We have arrived at a place where we need a moratorium on right to buy; we do not need to extend it any further. We need to address the fundamental

[Mr David Lammy]

problem of taking out of the system property that is paid for by taxpayers—we are talking about subsidised properties with discounts of up to £100,000. There is no other area of Government policy where Conservatives would support the idea of giving taxpayers' money to those who have and taking it from those who have not. This is a shame. If the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) becomes the next Mayor of London on the back of this Bill, very, very tragically, housing will be permanently ruined in this country for the poor.

6.18 pm

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): Labour is making many mistakes in opposing this excellent Bill. It is wrong to say that this is a national problem. I could take Members to some parts of our country, to some great cities, where there is not a housing crisis in the way that it is expressed in London. According to local papers—I have no reason to doubt them—there are homes for sale for less than £10,000. There are huge expanses of brownfield sites available in some urban areas in this city. In spite of all the excitement about the northern powerhouse, the population of Manchester is still a third lower than it was in 1931. I make that point to show that the crisis, which does affect us all, is overwhelmingly expressed in the south-east and, above all, in London, where it is at its most acute, as we have heard from Members from across the Chamber. The shortage is excruciating for those trying both to rent and to buy. That suffering was well articulated in the previous speech as well as by my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), in particular. It is vital, as everybody has said, to continue with our exertions to build record numbers of new homes and affordable homes in London.

I remind the House, despite the frenzy that we have just heard from Labour, that this mayoralty has worked flat out over the past eight years to make up for the passivity and inertia of the previous Labour Government and the locust years in which they failed to build enough affordable housing. If we were to have another Labour Mayor, which I devoutly hope we will not, I remind Labour that the previous Labour Mayor, at the height of the boom and at a time when the public sector was flush with cash, came absolutely nowhere near our record of building affordable homes. We have beaten him by 25% of our total, as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park said, and this year more new affordable homes have been completed than in any year since records began.

We are compensating for the instinctive hostility to home ownership exhibited by Labour, with 52,000 people helped into part-buy, part-rent schemes. That is why I so warmly welcome the provisions in the Bill. I am glad to hear the support for right to buy expressed by some hon. Members and it is right that we should give housing association tenants that right. We are righting an historical injustice and we deserve to hear whether those on the Labour Front Bench support the Labour Back Benchers who support our policy of extending the right to buy. We have heard some passionate defences of it. Symmetrically, it must also be right where possible to sell off high-value council homes and use the proceeds to fund not just the subsidy but the construction of new homes.

Members might not be aware that London already has a huge stock of social housing, with 33% of homes in the centre of the city social homes of one type or another, compared with only 7% in Manhattan and 17% in Paris. Across the whole of Greater London, the figure is 24%. High-value council homes could be sold, with the proceeds used to build more low-cost homes in London. Given what I have said about the geographical location of the housing crisis and given that it is in the capital where we have the demand, I am grateful for what we are hearing from the Government and from Members who spoke supporting this argument. It would be the height of insanity to take the funds yielded by those council home sales and spend them outside London on the right-to-buy subsidy without ensuring that we get at the very least a legally binding and funded commitment to a two-for-one replacement for those homes in London. I know that that is what we are working on and that it is widely supported by Members across the Government Benches. That would help us to build the 50,000 homes a year that we can build. We have the brownfield sites to do it.

I welcome the changes to the planning rules in the Bill and the continued support for the London Land Commission. We are working flat out to build more homes in this city than at any time since the 1930s, keeping pace with demand. The Bill will streamline planning, help us to assemble the public land we need and give tens of thousands of people the joy and pride of home ownership, a right that they are at present unfairly denied, and the opportunity that is at present most bitterly contested by bourgeois lefties, almost all of whom already own their own homes.

6.23 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Meanwhile, back on planet Earth, the smart move for the Government would be to split the proposals in two. There are some welcome measures in the planning section that could even be strengthened, and they could then go back to the drawing board with their housing proposals. That would allow the Secretary of State perhaps to recover some of the nice guy image to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) referred. That might be the way forward.

According to the Government's own statistics, rough sleeping is up 55% since 2010, but looking around our towns and cities that seems like an underestimate to me. Many of us will have come across parents with young children at our advice centres who are living either in hostels or in entirely inappropriate accommodation. We have a crisis, and not just in London. I know the Chancellor is not very good at recognising the impact of his policies on real people, but I urge Ministers to look at the Shelter analysis of their starter home plans. It shows that a family on the Chancellor's national non-living wage will be able to afford a starter home in only about 2% of local authorities across the country. That will not work. Lord Kerslake has pointed out that the Government's definition of starter homes stretches the definition of affordable housing beyond breaking point.

I do not understand the obsession with selling off council and housing association properties when there is such a housing crisis. I understand the aspiration of tenants to be homeowners, but I wonder why Ministers think that that aspiration does not extend to tenants in the private rented sector. Why are there no rights for those who rent in that sector?

As I have said, I welcome part 2 of the Bill, especially the action on rogue landlords and letting agents. I particularly commend the banning orders in clause 13, the database of rogue landlords and the rent payment orders. I also welcome part 5 and the more stringent "fit and proper" test for landlords, and, of course, clause 86, which offers a way forward at the time when the deterrent costs of court action often result in rogue landlords getting off scot-free. It could go further, however. This is about identifying and finding not just unfit landlords but rogue developers and people who exploit permitted development rules daily in my constituency and elsewhere, destroying the family homes we need and creating ugly, often unsafe, HMOs in communities that do not want them and do not need them. This is all done in pursuit of the vast profits they can extract through exorbitant rents and non-existent maintenance and repairs.

If the Bill was strengthened to protect family homes and to tackle unsafe extensions and breaches of permitted development rules, the Secretary of State would have some prospect of regaining his good guy reputation. As it is, the first part of the Bill is a mess and mistake and the second part simply does not go far enough.

6.27 pm

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I am keen to move the debate further north. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) represents the Birmingham metropolitan area, but I want to move us up to Leeds, as we have not been there so far. I take exception to the amendment tabled by the Opposition, which states that

"the Bill will not help most people struggling to buy their own home".

The problem we face in Leeds is the ineptitude of the Labour-run council in getting on with putting a planning policy in place and allowing homes to be built. There is no doubt that there is demand for housing in our area, but the council is not properly consulting the neighbourhood plans or the people. A six-week consultation is taking place, but most of my constituents have no idea that it is going on. They have no idea how to contribute and, when they do, they find that Labour councillors, in particular, are not interested in taking any notice of what they have to say. That is leading to a failure of the policy that put the power in the hands of local people.

To turn around and say from a politically motivated point of view that this is all the fault of the Government, who want to build on green fields, is, quite frankly, a lie. It is nothing more than that. Yes, the Government want more houses to be built and the Bill empowers that. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we have managed to get rid of more than 1,000 pages of planning law to simplify these matters. However, we are not telling the councils where to build that property. In fact, we are trying to be more helpful by introducing the brownfield land register.

Leeds City Council has said that it wants to build 66,000 homes. The debate has focused on London, where there is huge demand, but that is not the demand in Leeds. According to the latest data, there is demand for 44,000 properties, of which 39,600 could be built on brownfield land, but that is not the approach that the council has taken. My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) and I have spent hours, days, weeks and months arguing with the council and with inspectors about the actual demands and needs of the city, but because the council is pushing forward and saying that it needs the higher number, it has allowed the developers to say, "We can't possibly build that on the brownfield land so we've got to go out to the greenfield." That is especially so because the land is distributed equally between eight constituencies, leaving huge swathes of brownfield land in the middle of the city underdeveloped—it will not be touched, so the development moves outwards.

My hon. Friend and I face the ridiculous situation of having to take 12,500 houses in our constituencies. We do not have brownfield land; we are lucky if we have some windfall land. My hon. Friend has worked very hard on that because his constituency is much more affected than mine in this regard. If the council is building patches of 5,000 homes across a third of each part of the constituency, my hon. Friend and I believe that they should be built in one place. Do not give us death by 1,000 cuts by doubling the size of each village in the area with absolutely no infrastructure improvement. Adding 5,000 homes in just one third of my constituency would mean, on average, about 5,000 to 6,000 extra children. Where are they going to go to school? Where is the sewage going to go? Where is the water supply going to go? How is flooding going to be dealt with? None of those issues is being addressed. It is giving the developers the opportunity to get round all the loopholes and all the planning rules and say, "You're quite right—we are going to build on that field."

Unfortunately, until Leeds council comes up with a policy that is right, stops trying to blame the Government for building on greenfield land, and says, "We are a Labour party in Leeds who have been given immense powers by this Government, and we will use them responsibly and do something properly", we will not see the volume of house building that needs to take place to ensure the provision of affordable houses.

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the brownfield register will enable us to see precisely how many sites are not going to be regenerated? Is not that an absolute failure for the people who live in those communities and have to look out over these derelict sites while seeing the destruction of our valued countryside?

Alec Shelbrooke: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. The council is playing with people's lives. These are people who have moved into communities and are working damn hard to pay the mortgage and develop the life that they want, but they do not know what is going to happen. Saying that they want to be looking out on to fields and that they have paid for that is an important argument, but we also need to make the other arguments. Where are the children going to go to school? Where is the road capacity to cope with 400 houses here and 400 houses there, with no infrastructure improvements whatsoever? How do people get access to the doctor's surgery? People have genuine concerns about how they can function in their daily lives.

[Alec Shelbrooke]

I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to look at these areas and say, "We're giving you the power through a register of brownfield land. If you're not going to develop that land, we want to know why. We want to know why you've decided that all this land in the centre of Leeds is going to be left derelict and you're going to build on virgin land outside, whether it be green belt or greenfield."

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some powerful points. Is it not the case that developers will always go for the easy option, which is greenfield and green-belt land over brownfield land, and that we have to do everything we can to make sure that local councils are putting brownfield sites first?

Alec Shelbrooke: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know that he suffers from many of these issues in his constituency. The Labour party in Leeds is allowing developers to get away with this by going on to the most profitable land masses and building properties that are not going to help the situation. Houses worth £250,000 or £300,000 are not affordable starter homes in anybody's view.

The fundamental point is why councils are allowing developers to get away with this. Why are they being allowed to say, "We're going to leave that area derelict and build on this greenfield?" Most constituents in a rural area, if challenged to look at a meadow and say whether it is green belt or greenfield, would not be able to do so—most people do not know the difference. They are planning terms. People will then see swathes of land in the city centre that are not being developed because the council is not considering that. It is time for the council to get on with it, to engage with local people, to look at things strategically, to say "There's a brownfield register and we're going to use that land." They need to get on with building the number of houses we need rather than an over-inflated number that means that the developer will always be able to have the choice cuts and build the most expensive and profitable houses.

6.35 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke). I politely differ from his colleague, the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). As a Member of Parliament for a constituency in the north of England, where the average house price is 12 times the average income, I would say that this is clearly a national problem. Of course it varies in different areas, but we have a national emergency, even, in housing. Millions of people suffer daily from poor housing, or from the uncertainty of not knowing where they will be living from one month to the next and whether they can send their children to the same school one term after the next. Across the country, we have soaring house prices several times higher than a median earner can afford, and a rental sector in which many people spend over half their income on rent.

There is a need for Government, first, to show that they understand this emergency, and then to show the ambition to make real change that improves people's lives. However, this Bill is disappointing and unambitious at best, and brutal and counter-productive at worst. It does not make a significant attempt to tackle the housing crisis or show any signs of being written by anyone who even understands that crisis. Instead, it is an all-out assault on social and affordable housing at the very time when those homes are most needed. It seems to be driven by a narrow, dogmatic belief that home ownership is the only thing that matters in housing, and it demonstrates a total absence of any grasp of the real issues facing families in housing need in in Britain. It will have long-term consequences in breaking up communities through selling off homes, and those consequences will be damaging and irreversible.

The Bill barely even addresses those crucial issues and certainly does not tackle them. It forces councils to sell off higher-value homes and makes no commitment to replace homes sold off under the extension of right to buy to housing association tenants. It allows developers off the hook from providing affordable homes and instead prioritises so-called starter homes that were not affordable in the first place and certainly will not be after their first owner. While it has positive aspects on rogue landlords and speeding up planning processes, it is mostly an eclectic jumble of initiatives that miss the point of the housing emergency before us.

Access to housing is fundamental to our liberties, our opportunities, and our hopes for the future; that applies to every person here. We therefore need a positive vision for housing that meets existing needs and gives security to the most vulnerable. We need more homes of all tenures—affordable homes that must live up to their name and be genuinely affordable. We need an ambitious plan that increases home-building to 300,000 properties a year, that is forward-thinking, and that sets us up for the low-carbon future that is essential for the sustainability of our planet.

The Liberal Democrat vision is based on understanding this emergency and having ambitions to solve it. It is a vision of 10 new garden cities strategically placed where new communities can grow and thrive; of empowering councils to manage their housing stock effectively, enabling them to borrow what they can and build what they need; of stimulating private sector investment in housing through the creation of a housing investment bank; of supporting and sustaining rural communities to ensure that young families can afford to continue living in the place they call home; of strengthening local communities by bringing empty homes back into use; and of tackling the excessive second home ownership that damages communities in rural areas such as the west country and Cumbria.

Instead of that, this Bill will cause the break-up of communities as homes sold off under right to buy and the forced sale of council homes are lost to local people. Its provisions will significantly reduce the number of social and affordable homes, leading in turn to a rise in homelessness and adding to the already huge waiting lists totalling 1.6 million people. With more people in expensive temporary accommodation or in the private rented sector because there are not enough affordable homes, there will be extra costs for the housing benefit bill.

The flaws in this Bill are clear and the unintended consequences are extensive. Britain needs a radical, ambitious, compassionate housing policy that addresses the needs of supply and affordability and strengthens, not dismantles, communities. This Bill is worse than a wasted opportunity. It will inexcusably make the housing emergency worse. That is why we will oppose the Bill tonight and speak up for the millions for whom the housing emergency is not a political issue, but a daily reality.

6.39 pm

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): I had prepared a brilliant speech of 20 minutes, which will probably benefit from being condensed into four and a half minutes.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), although he will understand that I disagree with almost all he said.

Last May I was elected on a manifesto that made a number of promises to those who want to own their own homes. The dream that many people have of owning their home will no longer be a dream—the Bill will start to make that dream a reality. I am particularly pleased with the concept of starter homes. It is innovative, and it is essential at a time when the prospect of home ownership stretches well into their 30s for so many, and 37% of households in the 25 to 34 age group live in private rented accommodation, and owner occupiers in the same cohort have dropped from 59% to 36% in the past decade. This is an essential part of the Bill and I welcome it wholeheartedly.

Much criticism has been made of the Bill today on two bases. The first is that in London the cap is £450,000 and outside London it is £250,000. The point is that that is a cap. As the Prime Minister said in response to the Leader of the Opposition,

"We want to see starter homes in London built at £150,000 and £200,000"—[*Official Report*, 14 October 2015; Vol. 600, c. 307.]

The charge is that land is being brought back into use for that purpose at a cost above development value, but it is land that would not otherwise be used. It is surplus brownfield land, so that contention is at best questionable. The Opposition argue that this will cancel out the building of other properties, particularly rental properties. I accept that 37% of affordable homes were delivered through section 106, but the land that it is proposed to use for starter homes is surplus industrial land, which would not attract section 106. There is an incentive for many developers to continue developing properties for rent through section 106, and to develop this surplus land for starter homes.

Let me deal briefly with some aspects pertaining to London. When my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) is elected Mayor next year, he will inherit a wholly different legacy from that which my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) inherited. The failure of Labour in housing supply was writ large in London, and it is a tribute to my hon. Friend that by the time he leaves office 100,000 more affordable homes will have been built.

I applaud the launch of the London Land Commission in February, and I am pleased that it is already in existence. For many years the public sector has been far too slow to bring forward excess, surplus and non-operational land. I therefore support the requirement in the Bill for local authorities to compile and maintain a register of brownfield land. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider how this may work in cities with mayoral powers. The Mayor of London—and no doubt mayors in other cities in future—has a strategic role in housing and planning. Surely the Mayor should have a formal role to co-ordinate that city-wide.

As I said, I am a huge supporter of the London Land Commission. The housing supply in London could be increased by bringing excess land into development for residential use. Will the Minister consider two small changes to the London Land Commission, which he jointly chairs? The Bill offers him the opportunity to introduce the right of first refusal for all surplus assets being sold to be offered to the land commission. It also offers him the opportunity to introduce a duty to co-operate—a duty on public authorities to work with the land commission, whether that is the London Land Commission or the Manchester land commission when it is established, to bring on that surplus land and develop those much-needed houses.

Far from being the "no home of your own Bill", as some have charged, the Bill offers the chance for people to own their own home. Many say that an Englishman's home is his castle. Under this Bill more people in our country will fulfil that aspiration and have the opportunity to own a castle of their own.

6.44 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): It is interesting that I follow my borough colleague, the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond). I am lucky enough to represent the best half of the London borough of Mitcham and Morden.

We know that the first-time buyer, whom we all suggest we support, is being crowded out by many things—not just by the number of properties being built, but by buy-to-let landlords and non-UK international investment in our property market. To give any chance to first-time buyers, the Government need to reassert the crucial moral and civic distinction between owning one's family home and using the housing market as an investment to further one's financial assets.

Last year international money bought 28% of central London properties. Much of that money was illegally gained. Property is bought with international money not just in central London, but even out in Mitcham and Morden. Two years ago a constituent emailed me to report that his daughter, who was looking for a property, found 32 people trying to purchase the same property on the same morning. His daughter and her boyfriend were standing next to a representative of a Chinese bank. That couple were in no position to compete with that money.

We must tackle two things if we want first-time buyers to have any opportunity in London and the south-east. If we want more money to build more homes, and everyone is agreed that we do, why not abolish tax breaks on buy-to-let mortgages? Why is it right for somebody who wants to be a landlord to get a tax break, but not for somebody who wants to live in their home? I appreciate that the Chancellor recently announced a reduction in tax breaks for landlords, and I saw in *The Telegraph* at the weekend that some landlords are starting a backlash. I hope the Minister will hold firm and consider that getting rid of tax breaks on buy-to-let mortgages would release £6 billion—enough to build 100,000 new homes.

[Siobhain McDonagh]

Why do the Government not look at international investment in the London property market? Why not introduce a levy on people who do not intend to live in their property or even to let the property out, but to keep it empty while its value increases? That is abhorrent in the current situation. I ask the Government to look at exciting developments such as the YMCA's Y:Cube in my constituency, whose opening the Minister attended. This offers prefabricated properties at 65% of the area's market rent, with great standards of heating, providing a good place to live at a reasonable cost and a great investment for social investors, with a guaranteed return.

I have worked at the coalface of housing for most of my life, when I had a proper job. I worked in Wandsworth as a receptionist on the homeless persons unit, I worked as a housing adviser, I argued with landlords to get temporary accommodation for homeless families, but I have seen nothing like I am seeing now. The families who were homeless when I worked at Wandsworth were families with young children. The families I see in my advice surgery have three or four children, who are at the top of their primary school or at the start of their secondary school. I say every week to half of the people who turn up, "Don't worry. Section 21 will expire, then you'll go to court, then you'll get evicted, then you'll go to band B on the register. It will be fine and the council might provide you with temporary accommodation." That is in my constituency in south-west London.

The families in Merton who become homeless get housed in Luton, Harrow or Wembley. The parents plead for the right to be able to continue their work. They plead for the right for their children to get to school. All this means that we are storing up social problems, the like of which we have never seen. On behalf of all those families and for the future of those kids, I plead with the Government to look at the situation with a fresh eye.

6.49 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow two south London Members of Parliament, but it is important that the House sends a clear message today that the housing crisis we face should not just be seen through the prism of London, but is one that faces the whole of our country. Many people listening to this debate will applaud wholeheartedly the measures that the Government are taking in the Bill to show that they get it—that they understand the scale of the problem this country faces and are doing something about it. The right to buy will benefit up to 13,000 families in my constituency. Hundreds of my constituents have already benefited from Help to Buy, as they have from self-build projects. Starter homes will give thousands more the opportunity to have what we know so many people in our country want, which is a home of their own.

I will add three brief points to the debate. The first is that we have continued to build high volumes of new homes in Basingstoke throughout the recession, because it is a great place to live. When other local authorities were not doing their bit, we kept on doing ours. In the past 10 years, nearly 9,000 new homes have been built in Basingstoke, and 75% of my constituents now feel that enough homes have perhaps been built in our local area. However, in our emerging local plan, as it currently stands, we are being asked to build 850 homes a year during the period of the plan, amounting to a total of more than 15,000 new homes up to 2029.

In comparison with some neighbouring authorities, which we respect deeply, Basingstoke has considerably outperformed them on house building, delivering some 50 new dwellings per 1,000 residents, which is a good 25% to 50% more than in neighbouring areas. Nationally, my constituency has had one of the highest levels of house building for more than a decade. It has recently been ranked the third fastest growing town in the UK in the past 10 years. When the Minister replies, will he assure my residents that their views are being listened to by the local planning inspector and that the previous house building that is driving up the demand for the future can be properly understood, not perhaps misunderstood, as part of that process?

My second point is that all new homes must be the best. We expect new homes, whether starter homes or any other sort of homes, to be of the highest standards. I applaud the Minister for his drive in this area. He has set up the design advisory panel to make sure that exemplar designs are available for all to use. We can get the best houses only if we have the best people to build them. I again applaud the Government for understanding that and for making sure that Government apprenticeships are a top priority.

We also need to make sure that we have a robust and transparent building inspection regime to ensure that the homes are well built and fit for purpose. The Minister and I have had many conversations about that, and he knows my strength of feeling on the matter. He will also know that the all-party group on excellence in the built environment is holding an inquiry into the quality of new house building, under the able chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile), and that we will put our thoughts to the Minister when we have concluded our inquiry.

Oliver Colvile: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must ensure that we do not have any sloppy building, which is the key issue in all of this?

Mrs Miller: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Why should we accept sloppy building when it comes to a house? Given that we would take a sloppily made mobile phone back to the shop and expect a full refund, the same needs to be applied to housing.

I plan to table an amendment on the important point of addressing the status of building control performance standards. Those guidelines are currently regarded as best practice, and I believe that they need to be taken forward in a much more formalised manner.

The final point I want to make—I want to allow other hon. Members to contribute to this important debate—is on the issue of right to buy in relation to almshouses. I welcome the measure to extend the right to buy. As I have said, 13,000 of my constituents could benefit from this important measure. Many of them supported the measure at the general election, which is why it was important that it was central to our manifesto. However, some concern has been expressed to me by providers of almshouses about the possibility that the measures in the Bill may inadvertently draw them into a situation in which their residents acquire a right to buy in a way that is incompatible with the charitable status of almshouses.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): A trust that looks after almshouses in my constituency has expressed a similar concern, but as I understand it, the Minister has already confirmed that almshouses will be specifically exempt from the proposals in order not to break up a rather important historical and heritage legacy in housing.

Mrs Miller: I raise the issue particularly because Colonel Massey, clerk of the Ironmongers Company and the Sir Robert Geffery's Almshouse Trust, has written to me about it. The trust owns and runs the almshouses called Geffery's Fields in my constituency. Like my hon. Friend, I understand that the right to buy proposals do not affect almshouses, but the Sir Robert Geffery's Almshouse Trust needs reassurance in this area. In his remarks, I hope that the Minister will put minds at rest by ensuring that such people can see that a particular exclusion has been put in place for them.

This Government understand that owning one's own home is simply part of the DNA of being British. It is part of the British dream. I believe that the Bill will help more people to realise that dream.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Hon. Members who have sat through all the debate, patiently waiting to speak, will be delighted to know that several of their colleagues do not have the patience that they have shown and have indicated to me that, having said they wished to speak, they now do not wish to do so. Most unusually, I will therefore increase the time limit for Back-Bench speeches to six minutes. Hon. Members can look on this as a bonus for the patient, the first of whom is Mr Tristram Hunt.

6.56 pm

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): I am enormously grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The age of austerity has ended—in so many ways.

It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). At the end of her very interesting speech, she spoke about how owning a home is a British dream. In fact, it was a German immigrant, the Prussian attaché to the embassy in London, a man called Hermann Muthesius, who first identified English culture with the home. He wrote in 1904:

> "There is nothing as unique in English architecture as the development of the house…no nation is more committed to its development, because no nation has identified itself more with the house."

Muthesius thought England was

> "the only advanced country in which the majority of the population still live in houses, a custom that has survived all the political, social and economic changes that European civilisation has undergone in the past hundred and fifty years."

Muthesius did not bank on the terrible record of the coalition Government. Under the previous Labour Government, the number of homeowners rose by 1 million, while under the Tories it has fallen by 200,000. To that, we can add their rank failures on homeownership, private renting, affordable homes, and housing benefit. The profligacy of this Government is startling, with housing benefit now costing over £24 billion a year. I think that Members on both sides of the House would have liked to welcome the Bill as a way to kick-start homeownership and to clear up the coalition mess. Instead, however, we have an absolute dog's dinner of a Bill. It will do little to solve the housing crisis, and I worry that it will potentially exacerbate community relations.

Let me start on the areas of agreement. I welcome policies that extend the opportunity for people to own their own homes. I welcome measures that restrict the operation of rogue landlords and letting agents. I welcome the register of brownfield land. I agree with the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) that the clauses on self-build and custom house building have much to recommend them. I hope that they will give a boost to an industry that too often loses market share to German competition.

I wish, however, to focus on the extension of the right to buy to housing association tenants. As the House will know, the right to buy was originally a Labour party policy, which was debated in office by both Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan, and finally enacted by Margaret Thatcher. If such a policy is fully funded and planned appropriately, it could be a powerful tool for social mobility and aspiration, which I welcome. However, under Conservative Governments it has always been mismanaged horribly. The replacement social homes have never materialised. Between 2012 and 2015, some 32,000 homes have been sold, but in their place only 3,500 social houses have been built. The Government have stripped out tens of thousands of homes, with no obligation that the money will be used to fund replacements, let alone in the same area.

Now we have a plan to force councils to sell their housing stock to fund the right-to-buy policy for housing associations—a policy that both the National Housing Federation and the Local Government Association condemn. As ever with the Tories, the sums do not add up. Expecting an auction of expensive council homes to compensate housing associations, to fund a £1 billion brownfield regeneration fund and to build the two-for-one replacement homes is simply not credible.

Then there is the aggressive statism, with 32 new powers being handed to the Secretary of State. I thought that we were entering an era of localism and devolution. Instead, we have the iron fist of the Treasury dictating to councils what they can and cannot do, demanding up-front payments from councils on the expectation of receipts, and undermining the autonomy of housing associations.

Finally, I will touch on the potential impact on community relations. We live in an age of high migration. The Government promised to bring immigration down to the tens of thousands. Instead, we have net inward migration of 300,000 a year. Government statistics show that a significant and increasing number of tenancies for social homes are given to people from outside the United Kingdom. In Stoke-on-Trent, the figure stands at well over one in 10 for housing association homes.

Most of us think that properly managed migration is good for the country, but when public concern is at an all-time high, we cannot ignore the sensitivities. The Secretary of State said that foreign nationals would have to be here and pay tax for longer than three years to qualify for this policy. I do not see how that fits with EU law. There are concerns in my constituency that this policy will entail selling off council housing that was built for the workers of Stoke-on-Trent to fund a discount

[Tristram Hunt]

in social housing for those who, rightly or wrongly, are not seen as having made the same contribution to the community and our welfare system. That is not a recipe for strong community cohesion. With the approaching EU referendum intensifying the focus on such issues, the Government must be sensitive to the social effects of their policies.

As I set out at the beginning of my speech, it took a German migrant to explain to the English their love of home life. It would be a great shame if this policy allowed our proud history of cultural exchange and respect to be so unnecessarily undermined on the altar of ideology.

7.2 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Since becoming an MP, the most common issues that constituents have raised with me have been housing and planning. Many of my constituents are concerned about being unable to buy their first property. Like me, they are greatly encouraged by the Government's Help to Buy scheme, which has helped 240 families in Bolton West to find a home. They are also encouraged by the Government's commitment to provide starter homes and the emphasis that the Bill places on planning authorities to promote their supply.

Having said that, more often my constituents have highlighted the problems associated with planning, such as the increasing pressure on local services, amenities and transport infrastructure. As the demand for housing increases, we must respond to the challenges that additional housing brings, particularly the challenge faced by our transport infrastructure. Increasingly, my constituency is part of the commuter belt for Manchester, a work destination for other commuters and a place where people from further out in Lancashire come to use the local railway stations for park and ride. That all adds pressure on the local road and rail network which does not seem to have been addressed when each individual housing project has been designed and built.

The Government's investment in local transport infrastructure, especially the electrification of the Manchester-to-Preston line, which has stops at Lostock, Horwich and Blackrod, is welcome. We all look forward to seeing the increased capacity that the upgrade will bring. However, increased demand for rail brings its own problems, particularly around the Daisy Hill and Atherton railway stations. They are increasingly well used by commuters, but every day there is a horrendous parking problem around the stations. Not only are the local car parks full, but all the nearby roads are filled with commuter parking, which causes substantial disruption and inconvenience for local residents.

Ten years ago, the proposals for the A5225 Westhoughton bypass were cancelled, much to the dismay of local residents. We have the new houses but not the infrastructure to go with them. Improved transport infrastructure must be introduced in tandem with development. Another example of missing transport infrastructure is junction 7 of the M61. The Horwich locomotive works is due to be redeveloped, with the building of 1,700 new houses. My constituents are very concerned that that will put even more pressure on road infrastructure, so we need this vital link on our local motorway.

The loco works in my constituency is a prime example of where local concerns must be listened to. The site is brownfield and, on the whole, local residents support its development, which is in line with Government policy. Many of my constituents have contacted me to say that, despite that, they have little confidence that their concerns over health services, recreation, education, transport and the decontamination of industrial land will be dealt with adequately by the local council.

I strongly welcome clause 103, which requires local planning authorities to compile a register of land. I believe that there should be a register of brownfield sites, whether they are suitable or unsuitable for development, to speed up the delivery of housing, while protecting our green spaces. That information would be particularly useful to local action groups, who may use it to campaign on housing developments that are suggested for local areas. Like many people, I was disappointed by the plans to build on Roscoe's farm in Westhoughton, without first making use of the local brownfield spaces that are available.

Given that only 64% of local planning authorities have adopted a local plan, I am pleased that the Bill seeks to improve that figure. It is vital that local planning authorities make such plans to decide how best to meet housing needs and that they publish them, so that local people are not excluded from the process. A plan-led system is crucial to creating sustainable development in local communities. People in the local community must continue to have a say on decisions that affect them and their families.

7.7 pm

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): It is a birthday treat for me to speak in this debate, and to get an extra minute. As we get older, we have a tendency to look back on our childhood. Thirty-three years ago, my mom and I were homeless. She applied to the local council in the west midlands as a single parent with a five-year-old child. After a couple of weeks of staying with friends, we were granted a council flat. I will never forget the security and warmth of our new home, nor my mom's relief that we were no longer homeless.

Fast-forward three decades and if we were in the same situation today, we would be put in a hostel, so-called bed-and-breakfast accommodation or the private rented sector. Many families and children are in that situation. They are often uprooted from their communities, support networks and schools, and placed miles away from families and friends. According to figures released by Shelter only today, more than 100,000 children will be in temporary accommodation this Christmas.

In the early 1980s, council properties were not in short supply. Now, across the country, 1.4 million families are on the waiting list. Councils often do not have properties for homeless families or others who have been on the waiting list for years.

Lyn Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her story, because the social costs of these policies are not often aired in our debates. I, too, grew up in a council flat. It was safe, secure and stable, and it enabled my sister and I to thrive and to strive. Is not the real crime of this Government's housing policy that it will deny so many children the very opportunities that our council properties gave us?

Emma Reynolds: Absolutely. The research shows that if a child is shunted from school to school and from area to area, they are more likely not to fulfil their potential at school and to do badly later in life, and those children who are being forced around the country are in that situation precisely because of an acute shortage of social housing.

Why do we have a shortage? The answer is simple: the failure to replace homes sold through right to buy and the failure to build social housing. I am not ideologically opposed to right to buy—I am not anti-aspiration and I am not against home ownership—but I am ideologically opposed to Tory Governments running down the number of council homes, and that is exactly what this Bill endeavours to do.

Since the introduction of right to buy, we have lost more than 1.5 million council homes, and that takes into account some of those that have been replaced. No Government have found a way to fund the discount and secure the building of new homes to replace homes sold. Worse still, the Tory Governments of the 1980s and 1990s let our council houses fall into rack and ruin. Many had damp kitchens, leaking windows and mouldy bathrooms.

I am proud of the Labour Government's decent homes programme, which transformed 1.3 million homes and the lives of the families in those homes. Over our time in office we built 500,000 affordable homes, but let us be frank: our Government also failed to replace homes sold through right to buy.

In the last Parliament, the Tories spoke of reinvigorating right to buy, but their real agenda was and, I am afraid, continues to be to run down the stock of social housing. They introduced taxpayer-funded discounts of up to an eye-watering £100,000. They promised one-for-one replacement, but failed to deliver on that promise. Therefore, while the lucky few get a bigger discount, the social housing stock declines, leaving families languishing for years on council waiting lists, and the taxpayer is left to pick up the bill, with housing benefit going through the roof.

This Bill is yet another ideological attack on social housing. It contains provisions to force councils to sell off council homes; to legislate for housing associations to sell off homes; and to remove the requirement for developers to build affordable homes. On the forced sell off, let us be in no doubt that in some inner-city areas this Bill spells disaster for social housing. Frankly, it is also a slap in the face for localism. The Government call these homes "expensive," but they are not luxurious. They are homes in high-demand areas. Selling them will mean that there will be no social mix in inner London and some other inner cities, and more homeless families will be forced to move miles away from their communities.

This ideological attack on social housing was rushed out during the final weeks of the election campaign. I know that because I was the shadow Housing Minister at the time. In the first weeks of this Parliament, I asked the Government numerous questions about how they were planning to fund the policy. I tabled a question about what estimates they had made of the value of the council homes they were going to force councils to sell and of the number that would become vacant each year. To be frank, the Housing Minister did not have a clue—he admitted that he did not know. The truth is that the Government do not have a proper plan to replace homes sold through right to buy.

To add insult to injury, this Government are removing the requirement for developers to build affordable homes. Of course we need homes for first-time buyers, but the requirement to build starter homes will replace the requirement to build affordable homes, which will lead to even fewer badly needed affordable homes.

Successive Governments have failed to get enough homes built to meet demand. The Conservatives say they are the party of home ownership, but home ownership is at a 30-year low. Successive Governments have failed to replace homes sold through right to buy. I support people's desire to have the security of owning their own home, but we must recognise that there will always be people who cannot afford to buy and who need to rent.

We do not believe that the Government are going to replace the homes one for one. They failed to do so in the last Parliament and I would wager that they will also fail to do so over the next five years. There is nothing aspirational about running down social housing so that families who need it will not be able to rely on it, like my mom and I did more than three decades ago. This ideological attack on social housing is the real agenda behind this Bill and this Government, and that is why I will be voting against it tonight.

7.15 pm

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds). I wish her many happy returns. At my age, I have further to look back on my childhood than she has, but I remember growing up in an ordinary London suburb in a modest home that had been bought as a result of the hard work of my Labour-voting, shop steward, dock worker grandfather. That was about aspiration. There was no ideology about it. Those of us who have worked our way up in the world will not take lectures from the Labour party.

Lyn Brown *rose—*

Robert Neill: I will not give way at the moment. I acknowledge the balanced contribution of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East, but we will not take lectures from her more ideological colleagues about the importance and value of aspiration.

I also remember from my childhood how the lives of the families of my school friends who lived on neighbouring council properties were transformed by the right to buy when it was introduced by Margaret Thatcher. They were given opportunities and security that they had never had before. It is important that Opposition Members remember that the aspiration for ever to be dependent and to be renting is not the aspiration of the majority of the British people.

The hon. Lady is right to say that we all need to build more homes. I recognise that Governments of both parties have failed in that regard, but the reality is, and history shows, that home ownership peaked at 71% in 2003. That happened under the Labour Government at a time when they were largely following the economic policies of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). After 2003, as the Labour party moved to the left, it lost economic credibility and

[Robert Neill]

home ownership declined steadily. The coalition inherited the mess it left behind, which had presented the market with further problems. That is the reality and there is no way Labour can escape that. That is the true history of the matter. This Bill therefore provides a welcome and much-needed boost for the housing supply. The coalition Government made a good start, but we need to do more and my right hon. and hon. Friends in the ministerial team recognise that.

My hon. Friends the Members for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) have all referred to the particular issue of the London housing market. As a London MP, I endorse and support everything they said, which is why I will support their proposed amendment. The London housing market is complex and much more varied than anywhere else in the country. In looking at how constructively to introduce the right to buy for social housing tenants in London, we will have to bear in mind the particular pressures on the London market as a result of its land-replacement costs being so much higher than those in the rest of the country.

I get the sense that Ministers understand that, and my hon. Friends and I look forward to working with them to achieve an outcome that increases the total supply in London. That includes what we generally call "affordable housing," although nowadays that term is sometimes used as a proxy for social rented housing, which is important. Perhaps we also need to consider intermediate forms of tenure, which often relate to the squeezed middle in London who are in employment, working hard and cannot immediately get on to the market, but who will never qualify for subsidised social housing. Getting that mix right is absolutely critical.

On the Bill's planning and compulsory purchase provisions, the planning changes are welcome, particularly the increased transparency as a result of making available basic financial information about planning applications. That follows on from the work my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I did in government to refine and rationalise the rules on predetermination. We can now have a sensible debate about the pros and cons of planning decisions to be made by communities and elected representatives. That is welcome.

Compulsory purchase might not be as headline grabbing as other parts of the Bill, but it is still important. I welcome the important proposals to make advance payment of compensation easier, but I hope the Government will reconsider the rate to be paid. I know they are considering 1% to 2%, but if a business loses its land through compulsory purchase, it will have to reinvest in its business, which, in most cases, will mean going to the bank for a loan. It would be much more equitable, therefore, to align the level of compensation more closely with the going commercial rate of bank loans. I hope we can consider that.

Another point relates to the useful changes to nationally significant infrastructure projects. I understand that it might sometimes be useful to have housing ancillary to a national infrastructure project—the consultation document talks about workers' accommodation and so on—but it would be perverse if, as under the current rules, and as a result of a nationally significant infrastructure project, land was compulsorily acquired at current use value and the acquiring authority then built and sold houses at the housing value, meaning that the original landowner loses their land without any element of the uplift that comes from the housing development. That seems anomalous and unfair, and I hope that Minister will think about it.

All in all, this is a good and constructive Bill, and I will have no hesitation supporting it in the Lobby tonight. I commend it to the House.

7.21 pm

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): I have several concerns about the proposals in the Bill, mainly around the impact on rural communities such as the one I represent. Some might well be unintended consequences, however, so I ask the Minister to consider them carefully.

There are problems with the lack of detail in the Bill, and I am concerned about the lack of consultation on the implications of some of the changes. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) about the right to buy. I, too, support it in principle, but it is important that it has a positive impact on the housing market, whereas there is a danger that the Bill will have a negative impact. The voluntary right to buy agreement between the National Housing Federation and the Government has removed from parliamentary scrutiny the precise terms of the agreements, leaving it to the Minister to define, while also removing the effective consultation with other affected parties. I am concerned about that.

Housing Associations have been told they will receive full compensation through a grant to make up the difference on any financial loss arising from right to buy, but it is not clear whether any conditions will be attached to the grant or how free they will be to spend the grant in the way they think best meets local need. Much of my constituency is rural, which is why I am interested in the rural aspect, and includes part of the Lake District national park, so I am especially concerned that the Bill does not take into account the particular challenges of delivering and retaining a mixed balance of tenures in rural areas. In an area such as the Lake District national park, ensuring adequate provision of social housing and affordable housing is critical if local people are to stay in the communities where their families live and where many have lived for generations. The cost of housing inside the national park is far higher than outside it, and local people often struggle to compete with the purchasing power of people from wealthier areas looking to buy holiday homes and second homes. The national park has recently been extended, which is only going to compound the situation.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) mentioned the gap between earnings and house prices in rural areas. I understand that the average ratio is 1:8, which means that many of the starter homes discussed will simply not be affordable to the people who need them to live in the local community. This is not just my view. The Country Land and Business Association also has concerns. It has said

> "it is vital that the government does not require councils to impose starter homes on rural exemption sites"

because it will not ensure sustainable rural communities with a range of tenures. For me, it is problematic that the reforms in the Bill focus on promoting homeownership through starter homes at the expense of delivering affordable social housing for rent. This will have a negative impact on the provision of affordable social homes in rural areas, and it could also have the unintended consequence of wiping out affordable housing in areas such as the national parks. It is critical that any planning obligations provide homes that respond to actual local housing needs. For example, in my constituency, one of the biggest problems is with elderly people's bungalows, and this was compounded by the bedroom tax. Elderly people in family homes have nowhere to go.

Replacing houses should mean replacing the houses sold with similar properties in the same communities at similar rents. The Bill needs to recognise the planning difficulties of building new properties within a national park. It can take a long time to identify the land and get a planning agreement to build within national park authorities because the process is so much more complex, and because it is so much easier to build outside the national park, people do not apply to build within it. If we are not careful, affordable housing within these communities could disappear and those communities will change for ever.

In my constituency, housing associations are delivering social housing in our rural communities, and they need the support and security necessary to continue doing so. I ask that the Minister carefully considers the impact of these proposals on our rural communities and, particularly given the ONS's decision last Friday to reclassify the housing association sector, ensures that housing associations have a secure future as independent third sector bodies with a clear role to do as much as they can to use their assets and borrowing capabilities to deliver the affordable housing we need and where we need it.

7.27 pm

Victoria Borwick (Kensington) (Con): I thank the Minister for listening to areas such as Kensington that want to encourage entrepreneurship and business and for continuing to exempt central London areas from the rules on converting commercial premises to residential premises. This recognises that mixed communities are vital in promoting local employment and industry, which is particularly important in north Kensington, which is a business and creative arts hub.

While welcoming the aspirational policies in the Bill and recognising the value and popularity of home ownership, I believe it is important to offer housing prices at different levels. I have been meeting housing associations and colleagues in the borough to discuss the issue in greater depth, but as many others, including my hon. Friends the Members for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), have so eloquently argued, there are unique features to central London, particularly high-asset areas such as Kensington, that require special consideration.

I would like to touch on the right-to-buy proposals, which, although aspirational, will require local councils to fund the discount received by the purchaser. This will force councils to sell off high-value vacant properties, or "voids", rather than being able to offer them to families in temporary accommodation and thus further decrease the stock. Housing people in temporary accommodation is expensive and often unsatisfactory, and when a void becomes available, local councils must be able to use the property, via the housing associations, for those on their lists.

I ask the Minister to consider land values in outliers, such as Kensington and other central London areas, and to appreciate that the levels should be related to local house prices. Many house prices in Kensington exceed £1 million, and it would be extremely expensive for the council to replace any sold stock. The problem of high-asset values is not unique to Kensington, so I support other colleagues in asking the Minister to keep the money raised by London sales in London to help fund London's housing provision where it is most needed.

I hope that the Minister will give thought to local land values and consider other possible exemptions—regeneration schemes, supported housing, sheltered care, housing specifically designed for the disabled—because although I support this initiative and want to help people into home ownership, it should not be at the expense of the provision of social housing for our most vulnerable.

I would like to touch briefly on the "pay to stay" proposals—again, I welcome the appreciation that those on good incomes should be able to pay a proper rent and put money into the system to help others. However, I am concerned that setting the level at £40,000 might be a disincentive to work, particularly if we consider a couple or young family with each earning perhaps £20,000 a year and starting out on their careers—two newly qualified teachers, for example. They will be expected to fund up to 80% of the market rent in Kensington and Chelsea, and might find themselves penalised, so I ask the Minister to look at tapering the rates, so that the Bill does not impact negatively on those it most wishes to assist.

Turning briefly to the starter homes proposals, we have become accustomed in central London to section 106 arrangements and have often been able to meet some of our housing need as well as assisting with the provision of disabled-accessible properties. While starter home provision will be financially attractive to developers, the homes are likely to be above the price threshold needed to help those starting on the housing ladder—a point that my colleagues made earlier. I urge the Minister to examine the implementation of the starter homes initiative. Although it has been popular outside London, we would want the Mayor and London boroughs to have a range of different models to encourage shared ownership, including First Steps and other provision. I ask the Minister to devolve the decisions to the local councils for them to choose the most appropriate mix of affordable rented and other models of shared ownership.

In common with my colleagues, I welcome the aspirations in the Bill to increase home ownership, and ask the Minister to consider local needs, particularly those in my Kensington constituency.

7.32 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Kensington (Victoria Borwick) and I enjoyed her contribution. I agree with her on the importance of our social housing and of looking after the most vulnerable. Many of my constituents, particularly young people, would love the opportunity to own their own home, but the Bill fundamentally misses the problem, providing another example of how out of touch this Government truly are. The problem facing Oldham and Tameside is not just of home

[Angela Rayner]

ownership—it is the problem of getting a home, any home or a space for people to call their own, enabling them to live, work and raise a family.

One of my concerns is that the current plans to deliver starter homes will be at the expense of affordable and shared-ownership properties that are vital in meeting housing needs in my constituency. Shelter has illustrated that in many areas, including mine, starter homes will not be affordable to low and middle-income households. My constituency, like many across the north of England, has a low-wage economy. Gross average pay in Tameside is £413 per week, which is even lower than the north-west average of £480.

Many Members will share my experience of the increasingly desperate situation faced by constituents trying to secure affordable housing—constituents such as Claire, who works hard bringing up her young children and is just managing to keep her head above water. A deposit for home ownership is just a pipedream for constituents like Claire, when every surplus penny is used to make ends meet, pay the rent and bills and put food on the table.

Claire is just one of many thousands that are on the housing need register in Tameside. She resides in damp and poorly maintained private rented accommodation. She is part of the growing army labelled "generation rent"—a growing army that has helped to line the pockets of private landlords. Housing benefit has now grown to the sum of over £24 billion a year, an increase of £4.4 billion since 2010. The promise made by the Prime Minister to replace like for like each house sold under the right-to-buy scheme has already been broken. Some 1,346 houses were sold under right to buy in the north-west during the last three years, with a meagre 16 right-to-buy replacement homes being built.

The Chancellor has created a perfect storm in a dysfunctional housing market. The combination of the ill-thought-through right-to-buy extension along with the unfunded rent freeze has led to New Charter, a major social housing provider in my constituency, announcing the loss of more than 150 jobs. Last Friday, I met Ian Monroe, chief executive of New Charter, and he informed me that it has had drastically to scale back its plans to build an additional 2,000 desperately needed houses locally. It was New Charter's intention to build the 2,000 properties over the next four-year period, but the number has now been reduced to just 600. Clearly, this will have a direct impact on people such as Claire and on the local building industry. We will not be able to meet the ever-increasing need and demand for social housing in my area. To put this into context, our local housing waiting list currently stands at around 3,000 applications. New Charter receives on average 80 new applications every single week.

The preferred route of housing tenure being pursued by this Government—that of home ownership—is just not realistic for the majority of my constituents. Please do not get me wrong, though, Madam Deputy Speaker. I welcome aspects of the Bill that restrict the operation of rogue private landlords and letting agents, and I acknowledge of course that not all private landlords are irresponsible sharks. Unfortunately, too many private landlords have a "take the money and run" attitude. Our social landlords, such as New Charter, know that providing homes is not just about bricks and mortar; they know it is also about building communities. This Bill does not go far enough to make private renting an affordable, sustainable secure option.

As the Bill stands, it will mean a severe loss of affordable homes for local communities across England. It will centralise significant powers in the hands of the Secretary of State and deprive councils of the capacity to meet the housing needs of their communities. It will prevent local people from having a proper say in the planning process, as other Members have mentioned.

In conclusion, just a couple of weeks ago, I asked the Minister for Housing and Planning to come along to my constituency and listen to the very people who are being hit by the damaging measures implemented on the social housing sector. I have still not had a response to my invitation. Perhaps I will get one today—come on, I will brew up for you! Again, I ask the Minister to meet New Charter's management and the housing union Unison, which represents its workers. My colleagues and I on the Labour Benches are determined to protect our social housing for the sake of current and future tenants. Labour was and remains the party of mass house building, and we want to see Britain building again.

7.38 pm

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), who talked passionately about her constituents. I want to ensure that Britain is a country where her constituents and mine can all aspire—through good, decent jobs—to buy their own home. That is why I am pleased to rise in broad support of the Bill. I support the initiatives being taken forward on brownfield; I support the desire to streamline compulsory purchase orders; and indeed I support the right to buy. However, the Bill still needs further work and requires greater clarity in a number of areas. I hope, in the short time available to me, to make a few suggestions which I hope the Minister will consider carefully.

I believe that "planning in principle" must not be used inappropriately to overrule councils on greenfield sites. We have said that we want to streamline brownfield development, and that is absolutely right—we must prioritise such development—but councils must be listened to when they devise both local and neighbourhood plans. Moreover, the definition of brownfield lacks clarity. For example, would a town centre site where there is mixed-use building, both retail and residential, be considered to be brownfield if not all the building were in use? I believe that the Government are determined to regenerate our town centres to ensure that they are prosperous, vibrant places in which people can live, shop and work, and I support them in that, but we need clearer answers to such questions.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Has the hon. Gentleman given any consideration to the additional cost that might be involved in clearing brownfield sites, especially when industrial use is involved, and to what happens when the value of land is so low that resale does not meet that additional cost?

Mr Jayawardena: I was about to say something about the cost of brownfield remediation. I know that the Government have considered that very carefully, because they have announced a £1 billion brownfield regeneration fund. I am a passionate supporter of the fund. I think that it needs to be introduced more quickly, and that councils should be involved in its introduction so that they understand how to gain access to it, but I believe that it is an important initiative that will bring into use brownfield sites—industrial and commercial sites, for instance—that would otherwise not be suitable for housing development, and would lie empty to the detriment of greenfield developments.

As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green), it is important for the deal to include not only remediation but infrastructure. There is not enough in the Bill about how infrastructure can be delivered in step with new development. The Government's commitment to infrastructure projects is welcome, but I want to be certain that Ministers have considered carefully how those projects will conform with any planning process that is introduced by means of the Bill. As Members have pointed out, the community infrastructure levy will be reduced for brownfield developments, as it will be difficult to make use of brownfield sites with the same level of developer contributions, but it is critical that we do so. I do not want the reduction in the CIL to be a barrier to brownfield development, and I believe that the Government will step in to ensure that the regeneration fund is used for that purpose.

Simon Hoare: I entirely take my hon. Friend's point about the need to deliver infrastructure in step with new housing development, but local planning authorities are often cautious about what the inspectorate might deem to be onerous conditions. Might not greater clarity about what is and what is not onerous lead the authorities to adopt a more robust approach to setting conditions, and thus to ensure that infrastructure development is delivered apace?

Mr Jayawardena: My hon. Friend is right. Governments do not necessarily have to fund projects; they can help local authorities to deliver the infrastructure that communities need simply by providing that clarity. I am sure that Ministers intend, either in the Bill or in regulations, to set out in clear English what local authorities can and cannot ask for in delivering for their residents.

That leads me neatly to the subject of the brownfield register. Many sites are currently vacant, and it is important for us to bring them into use. Introducing a brownfield register is critical to that, and I welcome wholeheartedly the Government's enabling action, but I hope that they will adopt an approach that is common to the other parts of the planning process, such as the strategic housing land availability assessment process. Under SHLAA, it does not have to be the landowner who registers a property. It can be registered by any interested party, and the council then weighs that option alongside the others. That would be a helpful step, ensuring that even when land is not in common ownership, suggestions can be made and local authorities which are democratically elected—and if we believe in localism, we want to give them the power to make decisions—can decide what land is suitable for brownfield development in the future. If that is done properly, it will prevent local authorities from being landed on by other forces, be they neighbours or others, who want to introduce more development than is necessary to meet local need in their districts. Local authorities will have an opportunity to shape the future of their areas.

The Government want to make compulsory purchase orders clearer, fairer and faster, and I fully support that initiative. It will help local authorities to use the information that they have identified in the brownfield register, to establish the infrastructure needs in their areas, and to deliver a package of measures that will work for their communities. Again, however, more clarity is required, because it is not yet clear what steps will be removed from the process to make it easier for councils to do just that. They will need support, financial and otherwise, to deal not only with land purchase—which can be arranged through back-to-back deals with developers—but the administrative process of undertaking a compulsory purchase order. That is costly, and takes much time. Streamlining will help, but councils will still need more support.

I also fully support the right-to-buy policy because I think that people should have the change to own their homes, but I should like the Government to go further. I want the presumption in relation to affordable rented homes in any section 106 agreement on any new development to be replaced by the option for local authorities to say "No, we want affordable homes to buy." I want the Government to consider paragraph 50 of the national planning policy framework, which still requires local authorities to produce a mix of housing types and tenures. A local authority might say, "We already have enough homes to rent; we want more to buy." It should be for local authorities to make such decisions. It should also be up to local authorities to ensure that when money is being accrued from the sale of homes, there is potential for off-site provision, because it may well be possible to deliver more homes elsewhere

I support the Bill, but I hope that Ministers will give careful consideration to the points that I have made.

7.47 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I took careful note of the comments of the hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena). He is certainly not the only Conservative Member who has concerns about the Bill. Many Labour Members have made very good speeches, and have also expressed serious concerns.

The Bill brings no hope to the 600 families who are in temporary accommodation in my constituency, the thousands of young people with no hope of owning their homes, and those who cannot even find a place that they can afford to rent in west London. I agree with the excellent comments made by my hon. Friends, but I want to focus on the planning aspects of the Bill. It undermines a planning system which has stood the country well for 70 years, and which was introduced after the free-for-all speculative housing development of the 1930s. Making permanent the requirement for prior approval for change of use in offices, and extending it to industrial space, provides for a free-for-all of the same nature.

My local authority, Hounslow, has an excellent record of delivering housing across all tenures during the last Administration, including 3,000 affordable homes of which 400 are council homes. That was before the prior

[Ruth Cadbury]

approval was introduced. Many buildings and sites that are no longer appropriate for their old use—factories, offices, and a magistrates court—have been granted change of use for decent-quality housing, with appropriate agreements providing for affordability, decent space standards and decent amenity spaces. So there was no need to bypass local authorities by introducing the prior approval regime to remove the normal oversight on change of use to housing, which the Bill extends permanently.

I received an email from Brentford chamber of commerce asking me to speak up for its members, some 80 of whom have either been forced out, or fear being forced out, of their office premises as a direct result of the prior approval regime. The system has been devastating not only to small office premises in our town centres such as Chiswick and Brentford, but to the retail and catering businesses that depend on the lunchtime trade generated by the people who work in those offices as it is trade that the residents of the replacement flats do not bring. There are plenty of other brownfield and redundant buildings that could be used—indeed are being used—for housing without devastating the small business community of our town centres.

Since prior approval was introduced in May 2013, it has resulted in a loss or potential loss of 80,000 square metres of office space. Furthermore, while this has resulted in a net gain of 1,251 residential units in the borough, it has meant a potential loss of 512 affordable units. Why? Because if those schemes had gone through the normal planning applications process instead of the prior approval process, they would have had to have provided 40% affordable housing on site, as per the policies in the local plan. The prior approval process means no assessment or negotiation: no assessment of the space standards, parking standards, amenity standards and employment floor space.

The Bill contains welcome clauses on rogue landlords, but ironically it actually legitimises the creation of substandard housing with wholly inadequate space and other standards. I am not opposed to former offices becoming housing—or indeed schools, places of worship and so on—but we should use the planning system. It is open, transparent and accountable. We should use it to enable that to happen, not the clauses in the Bill.

The Bill removes the voices of local people and undermines local democratic control over development. It hands local authority planning powers to the Secretary of State and removes any community engagement. Yes, we need new homes, and we need great places to live, to learn and to play, but the "permission in principle" clause will severely restrict the ability of local authorities, community organisations and the public to comment on, or object to, development on these sites. Furthermore, there has been no public consultation on this provision.

We have no problem with the conversion of employment land and buildings being used to deliver the homes of the future, but not at the cost of vibrant businesses, or at the cost of a proportion of social rented and shared ownership homes, and at the cost of appropriate local oversight.

In conclusion, the Bill is bad for families in temporary accommodation; bad for all those who cannot afford to rent privately, such as the couple I met in my surgery the other week; bad for those small and growing businesses in west London, particularly in the town centres where landlords are rushing to change their property into housing; and bad for the shops, cafes and restaurants that depend on the lunchtime trade that those businesses bring. The Bill is bad for employers, such as the chief executive of our local hospital, struggling to recruit and retain qualified staff because of the housing crisis that the Bill will not solve. It is bad for the councils and community organisations shut out of planning decision-making, and it is bad for the communities that need a balance between housing, employment, space for community facilities and amenity space.

7.53 pm

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I strongly welcome the Bill. It stands comparison with some of the finest examples of progressive Conservative policies on housing in the past 100 years. It is a radical, yet pragmatic Bill, and it draws on the Government's success in areas such as Help to Buy and the fact that in the past five years we have delivered 260,000 affordable homes, with 140,000 housing completions in the last financial year. I have a great deal of respect for the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey). I read very carefully his piece in *The Observer* yesterday. It was long on complaint, but very short on coherent, costed and cogent alternative policies. He complains about the 32 new planning and housing powers invested in the Secretary of State, but in the same breath he says that we have a housing crisis in terms of supply, and that we need to deal with it. Well, we are dealing with it and needs must. We also have a manifesto commitment to deliver 1 million starter homes by 2020 and the right to buy for housing associations.

I, for one, make no apologies for being very proud that right to buy in the 1980s delivered the biggest transfer of capital to working people of any policy ever in British political history. I am very proud of what we did.

We have the right policy on starter homes. It was a little bit of an afterthought emerging from the ministerial fiat inserted in March this year into the NPPF guidelines, but now it will be on a proper legislative basis. I welcome the new legal duty on local planning authorities to promote the supply of homes and proper monitoring. I welcome, too, the flexibility between the number of homes and areas, because they will not be the same everywhere. We have discrete housing markets, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) said. I would perhaps challenge the Minister to consider the fact that there is, unless I am mistaken, no specific reference in the Bill to the insertion of starter homes in the affordable homes criteria. I might be wrong, but he might need to look at that in terms of the NPPF or in Committee. There may be some discrepancy with section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, where local planning authorities have to give proper cognisance to their adopted plans.

I support the introduction of a brownfield register. I welcome clauses 102 and 103 and the "permission in principle", in particular. Only last year, the Campaign to Protect Rural England told us that 975,000 homes could be delivered by virtue of utilising brownfield sites properly. We must, however, have a coherent cross-government policy on this issue. The Public Accounts Committee only very recently looked at the failures of the Department to properly co-ordinate and use its methodology to follow through on the provision of land to the actual building of houses.

Oliver Colvile: Does my hon. Friend recognise that if we are to encourage people to develop brownfield sites, we must ensure that if they have planning permission they should not just sit on it? Should we not consider ensuring that they start paying business rates on land which is potentially to be used for development?

Mr Jackson: I have long been an advocate of a fiscal disincentive from Government to land banking, but the idea of land banking is apparently an urban myth. We need to do more work on that and I hope the Minister will take on board my hon. Friend's comments.

Mr Bacon: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Jackson: On this occasion, I will.

Mr Bacon: Did my hon. Friend notice in the National Audit Office report a reference to 109,500 potential homes from the land that was sold? Does he agree that our constituents do not live in potential homes but actual homes and that they need to be sure that they actually get built?

Mr Jackson: My hon. Friend, in his normal astute and erudite way, puts his finger on it. One lesson was that the methodology was not as robust as it should have been in following through from the allocation of land to the actual construction of houses that people live in.

On tackling slum landlords, I strongly support and endorse part 2 of the Bill. In Peterborough, we have an issue with the degradation of large residential areas by slum landlords, which is very bad news for vulnerable tenants. This provision and the database are very welcome news, along with selective licensing, which is already in place under the Housing Act 2004.

We have scarce resources in government, and we need to focus them in the most efficient and effective way. We need to provide supported housing for people with long-term needs, such as mental illness. We need to look at extra care facilities and we need to keep our bargain or contract with working families, who struggle to get on the housing ladder. In order to drive the market, it is vital that we look at removing SME builders from responsibilities and obligations on the community infrastructure levy and on section 106. There has been too much consolidation by large oligopolistic construction companies. We need to bring some of those smaller companies back into the market. I urge the Minister to look again at vacant building credit and to challenge the High Court decision, because this is about getting marginal brownfield site developments that will deliver hundreds and thousands of homes to people. It is a grave disappointment that the Conservative council saw fit to challenge the Department on that issue.

I agree with permitted development rights for the conversion of commercial and office premises to residential development, and there should be greater clarity on that before article 4 is used by some local authorities to prevent such a move. I welcome part 6 of the Bill, and challenge the shadow Minister to say what else could be done when 18% of local plans have not been published, 35% are not fully adopted, and one in five local authorities does not have a land supply plan. Needs must—we must tackle these issues. I am not in favour of big government, but I am in favour of more homes for people in my constituency and across the country. I support clause 107 on nationally significant infrastructure projects, but we need more clarity on that.

We must also consider the wider context and the demographic changes that are affecting our country. The number of single person households doubled between 1961 and 2014, and immigration is an important issue. I accept that owner occupation may not be for everyone, and we must look at residential estate investment trusts and give tax breaks to extra care facilities to help with that hugely important issue of adult social care and acute care in hospitals. We must tackle the skills crisis in construction. Two thirds of small construction companies said in August that they turn down work because people do not have the skills—plasterers, carpenters, bricklayers, scaffolders and apprenticeships are important.

We must consider access to capital, infrastructure, brownfield regeneration, complex remediation issues, and bringing on to the market many more intermediate mortgage products so that we support do-it-yourself conveyancing, shared ownership, and other forms of intermediate tenure. Social renting is important in some areas, but we are moving away from that model.

In conclusion, the Bill is much needed and will revolutionise construction, housing, and planning in our country. I will be supporting it tonight.

8.2 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I feel that one story about social rented housing in this country is not being told, because for me social rented housing is a public asset that we should support for that reason.

My Gran and Papa moved into a house in Wishaw in 1963, and they lived there until recently. My Gran is going into a care home, and we are finishing the process of emptying that home. For 52 years that house was their home, but it is a social rented house that belongs to North Lanarkshire Council. It is nice to think that, having had a family through that house, other families will now get to enjoy it and make it their home until it passes to another generation.

My Papa did not believe in owning his own home—he must have been one of those rare people in this country that the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) would not recognise, given what he said about his home being his castle and the necessity of owning it. My mum described my Papa as a west of Scotland Presbyterian socialist, which may be why he took that view. Throughout their life in that house, he and my Gran had the opportunity to buy it had they chosen to, but they believed firmly that the house belonged to the greater good and the common good, and that there it should stay.

Many people whom I represent will not have the chance to own their own homes. Some people are very far from that point and might not even have bank accounts, never mind trying to get a mortgage. We need to provide choice for people in cities across our country—choice for people who want to live in a socially rented house. Many of my constituents want the option of a front and back door, rent set at a fair level, and the

[Alison Thewliss]

support that a housing association offers. Local authorities and housing associations provide social support to their tenants that the private sector will never provide, whether that is advice on debt and money, benefits, or just somebody who can be asked for help when a repair is required. We should bear in mind those important social functions.

When my Gran was living on her own she had somebody to call if there was an issue with the heating or electricity. Over the years that she lived there, the local authority invested in that house with heating, rewiring, cavity wall installation and new windows. Good social landlords will invest in property, but private landlords will not.

In Govanhill in my constituency, there is an ongoing project to bring housing from private ownership back into housing association ownership because the situation has deteriorated so badly. The houses are falling down because private landlords cannot—and will not—take on that responsibility. There is a social imperative to take back those houses and ensure that they are sustained for future generations. Glasgow tenements are symbolic, and everybody knows them when they think of Glasgow. Over the years, however, they have been lost to private landlords who are charging a fortune for them—money that is going on the housing benefit bill. Those tenements are being lost, and there is a real need for them to come back to the social rented sector.

Housing associations plan and make investments on the basis of the rents they receive. When houses are sold off under the right to buy, housing associations cannot plan for that investment or for things such as new kitchens or bathrooms for their tenants. They receive their tenants' money as income, and it gets reinvested, but that does not happen in many cases in the private sector.

Housing associations invest because they know that it will be worth it and they have a certainty of income. The Bill includes a 1% reduction in rents, and the head of the National Housing Federation had strong feelings about that when he gave evidence to the Communities and Local Government Committee. It may have been a personal view rather than that of his organisation, but he felt strongly that the Government should not be in the business of telling housing associations what their rents should be, as that should be for local housing associations to decide on the basis of what their tenants want and can afford.

There are many consequences to the right-to-buy policy. Longer waiting lists have been mentioned, and fewer large family homes will be available in local areas. That will force people out of those areas and reduce their diversity and social mix. It also has a knock-on effect on the sustainability of those communities. The pay-to-stay policy and the "high income" of £33,000 was mentioned, but that is not a high income by anyone's standards, and £40,000 in London does not seem high either.

The explanatory notes state:

"The policy intent is to take 'household' income into account when determining whether the high incomes thresholds are met and…the definition of household can be set by the Secretary of State".

I am worried that in larger family homes where teenagers or those in their early twenties cannot afford to move out, that measure will count against them and they will be forced out. Older and younger adults might be living in the same house and then be forced out of the area because young people cannot afford to rent anywhere. That is worrying and there should be more clarity about what "household" should mean when it comes to the detail of that provision. I also have a slight concern about housing associations in urban areas that perhaps are unable to get other land close by—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

8.8 pm

David Mackintosh (Northampton South) (Con): Housing affects us all, and I am sure that, like me, many hon. Members have stories of people who have contacted them because they are concerned about the costs of buying their own home and getting on the housing ladder as their parents and grandparents did, and as they want their children to do.

The Help to Buy scheme that was introduced in the last Parliament enabled 120,000 families to buy their own homes, and I am pleased that 243 families in my constituency benefited from that.

Catherine West: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Mackintosh: No.

Northampton is a high-growth area with many new housing developments being built. Earlier this year I visited one of the new developments, and the sales staff told me that 70% of new houses were being sold through the Help to Buy scheme. Clearly that scheme will end next year as the economy improves, but the new Help to Buy ISA being launched next month will provide support to people saving for their first home by providing a Government boost to their deposits. That will help people who work hard and want a home of their own to secure their future at every stage of their life.

These schemes show my party's commitment to housing and supporting the important aspiration of people to own their own home. This was the party that introduced the right to buy in the 1980s, and I am proud to be a member of the party that is extending the right to buy to housing associations. We can now end the discrimination for housing association tenants who were denied the opportunity to own their own home which, like council properties, have been built by councils yet get transferred over the years. I am pleased that constituents of mine living in housing association properties in Northampton have already been in contact with me to ask for an update on the right-to-buy extension, so I am sorry to hear the Labour party oppose extending the right to buy. We have to wonder whether they are actually against home ownership and the aspirations of people who want to work hard and get on in life.

I am pleased that this measure was achieved through a deal with housing associations, which many people said would not be possible. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on securing it. I am sure that housing associations will also welcome moves in this Bill to reduce regulations on housing associations.

Helping people to buy their own home is only part of the process; we also need to change the way we build and deliver affordable homes. For too long this has focused on simply providing low-cost rented properties.

In my view, people really want a home of their own, and so affordable homes need to be just that. The current planning rules prevent starter homes from counting as affordable, and first-time buyers cannot get the 20% discount on a new-build home, but these are the best type of homes for helping people on to the housing ladder.

We also need to ensure that councils can build more council homes and deliver enough homes to meet their local housing need. I know from my time as leader of Northampton Borough Council that for many years councils have not built enough new housing. That puts real strain on the system and does not help relations with tenants. I was pleased to announce the building of 100 new council homes in Northampton during my time as council leader to kick-start a major programme of house building. I know that that will take some time to complete, so I welcome the proposed changes to the planning system, including simplifying and speeding up the neighbourhood planning process. Indeed, I welcome the whole process for neighbourhood planning, including the plans in my constituency in the Castle area and in Duston, where the referendum takes place on Thursday. I wish them all well and congratulate everyone who has played a part in it.

I could talk about many things in this Bill that I support: the proposals to clamp down on rogue landlords; the provisions to provide more housing to help with homelessness; the work on bringing empty homes back into use; and the work on houses of multiple occupancy, which Members have mentioned and I think are linked to criminality and people trafficking. We have heard a lot, too, about the right-to-buy scheme replacing houses like for like. However, in my experience the biggest delay under the reinvigorated scheme was related to planning, so I welcome the changes in this Bill.

Housing is key for all of us. I strongly welcome the Government's focus on putting this at the forefront of the agenda and look forward to seeing the new revolution of house building and home ownership as we meet this country's housing need.

8.13 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): There seems to be a certain amount of agreement across the House that it is time for a new approach, but there is probably less agreement that this Bill is the answer. In my opinion, this prescription clearly does nothing to tackle the housing crisis. Where it does have an impact, I believe it will make matters worse, not better.

This Bill will continue to boost demand for housing while doing nothing to address supply. It will lead to rents and house prices increasing, and will mean that the dream of home ownership is even further out of reach for many of my constituents. We are told that measures in the Bill are focused on speeding up the planning system, but going faster is no good if it is all in the wrong direction and will lead to more and more planning decisions being taken against the interests of local communities who want not only housing, but the right developments in the right areas. They want green-belt and greenfield land built on as a last resort, once there is no capacity elsewhere, but instead we will have a "greenfield first" approach, with brownfield sites left empty in areas where local people are crying out for development, and for those sites that are not brought forward for development, local people will find themselves locked out of the process altogether, destroying any last vestiges of accountability in the planning system.

The planning changes brought about in the last five years have given us the worst of both worlds in Ellesmere Port and Neston. On the outskirts of Little Sutton in Ellesmere Port, developers have run roughshod over the wishes of residents to obtain planning permission for a large number of homes to be built on prime agricultural land. At the same time many brownfield sites closer to the town centre which have the capacity to deliver this number of homes and also bring much-needed investment into our town centre still lie empty. These sites have all had planning permissions in place for a number of years—all predating the permission in Little Sutton—but not one of them has had a spade enter the ground. Not one brick has been laid in anger and there is no realistic prospect of that happening while much richer pickings are available for developers elsewhere. The profit motivation of developers has been allowed to override any considerations about local wishes and, more importantly, about what is actually needed in the local housing market.

We have significant levels of land banking, but there is nothing in this Bill that would compel developers either to build on or to release land in areas where construction could start tomorrow. When I see large tracts of land lying empty in our town where permission is already in place, I see a system that is broken; when I see people in my constituency unable to live in a secure home of their own, I see a failure in the market; and when I read this Bill, I just see more of the same—I see a continued push for a market solution when the market has so clearly failed us.

A brownfield register will not help as we all know where those sites are now, and the obligations of developers under section 106 have already been watered down by the coalition Government to the extent that they are not worth the paper that they are written on. The result of this is that on numerous occasions developers have been able to use planning rules to get out of their obligations to build affordable homes. In the last few years more than 200 much-needed affordable homes have been lost in Ellesmere Port and Neston. Developers have driven a horse and cart through these weakened rules to plead poverty and say that they cannot possibly proceed with developments with affordable housing in them. They say that anything less than a 20% profit margin is impossible to work with, and so greed triumphs over need every time. The result is that their permissions are amended with the affordable housing element removed altogether. When the local authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council, tried to challenge this process the Secretary of State's inspector came down firmly on the side of the developer, handing local people a big bill for costs in the process. So here we have central Government penalising local councils financially for trying to meet local housing need, showing that the localism agenda this Government like to trumpet is in fact an illusion.

This Bill is just a logical extension of that centralising tendency and the downgrading in importance of affordable housing. Of course we want people to get on the housing ladder, but this Bill will not achieve that aim. There is nothing in this Bill that will compel developers to build homes at a price people can truly afford. What is labelled

[Justin Madders]

as a starter home in this Bill, at a cost of up to £250,000, is far out of reach for those whom we should be seeking to help. For those on the so-called living wage this pushes the dream of home ownership further away than ever. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), starter homes will only be affordable for those on the living wage in 2% of local authority areas. We have heard a lot about the Government being for the 1%, so I suppose being there for the 2% is an improvement, but this is not a laughing matter; young people in small market towns like Neston cannot afford to live there because the starter home price in this Bill is already in excess of the average house price in Neston and well in excess of the average house price across the constituency as a whole. The scheme will in fact be counterproductive. The maximum values could quickly become the default position, because the greater the price, the greater the profit. Even if we accept that a focus on starter homes might be the answer, the Bill does not tell us how many will be built. That, too, is left to the Secretary of State to determine. In reality, it will be left to developers to call the shots, and we will once again be relying on the market that has so palpably failed us.

The greatest omission from the Bill is any kind of plan to meet the existing need for social housing. How is my council's 25-year housing revenue account business plan going to stack up if it has to hand over unspecified amounts to the Government every year, on top of the multimillion pound drop in income that the imposed reductions in social rents will bring? How can it be right that housing associations will be able to enter into a voluntary deal on the right to buy—albeit with a gun held to their head—while the Government are saying to councils, "We're just going to take money off you and spend it as we wish"? That is an abuse of power, and it shows a high level of contempt and disdain for councils. The Bill is a misjudged, rushed, contemptible, ideological, back-of-a-fag-packet disgrace, and we should vote against it tonight.

8.19 pm

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). I know his area relatively well. It is near to where I was brought up, just over the water in the not-so-posh bit in Liverpool. I have been astonished to hear so many Opposition Members speaking against the Government's proposal to reduce the rent of those living in social housing. Hundreds of my constituents have contacted me to thank me; they can see that the Conservative Government are on their side because they are reducing their rent and putting more money in their pockets.

I broadly welcome the Bill. It is an excellent piece of legislation. In my first speech on returning to Parliament after winning my constituency with an increased majority and an increased share of the vote, I mentioned my concerns about the bones of the right-to-buy policy. I pay tribute to the Minister for Housing and Planning for his engagement with colleagues across the House and across the sector, and for all the work he has done on this. We now have an exceptional change scheme, which is being welcomed by people across the housing industry.

I was on the board of a housing association, and I refer colleagues to the details of my other property interests in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am extremely proud of the social housing industry, and extremely proud to be part of it. I am therefore very pleased that the Government have come forward with this solution, which will enable 1.3 million social tenants to benefit from the right to buy. Ultimately, when we stand up and speak in the House and decide whether to support a Bill, we have to ask ourselves whose side we are on. I come down on the side of the tenants who will benefit from a reduction in their rent and the tenants who want to exercise their right to buy and to realise the dream of owning their own home. I think that Opposition Members will come to regret the position that they have taken on social rents and on the right to buy when they find that hundreds, if not thousands, of people in each of their constituencies are exercising that right to buy.

The Government's proposals on starter homes deliver on a promise to move from generation rent, which was a problem in the last Parliament, to generation buy. We have to accept that home ownership has fallen; we now have some of the lowest levels since the 1980s. I was doing a bit of research over the weekend, and I looked at the multiples of median incomes in my constituency. They were between three and six times earnings across the constituency. I think that is a pretty high barrier to home ownership, but I then looked at the figures for London, where the multiples of median incomes are up to 32 times earnings. That is a barrier that people cannot cross. That is why it is so important that we have this proposal for 200,000 starter homes, with a reduction of 20% for first-time buyers under the age of 40.

I also welcome the Government's decision to create the design advisory panel. I have seen good design being sacrificed on the altar of cost on too many occasions, and I hope that the panel will enable us to build high-quality homes, with locally sourced materials, that are sympathetic to the local surroundings and that are fit for not only the first buyers but the second, third and fourth ones, and for generations to come.

I hope that, as the Bill goes through Parliament, we will take the opportunity to discuss other steps that the Government could take to enable first-time buyers and others to get over that high hurdle created by high property values and multiples of median income. I believe, for example, that they should look at shifting the burden of stamp duty from the buyer to the seller. This would ensure that, all the way up the chain, every single person who was buying would get a reduction in stamp duty and that first-time buyers would pay none at all. We talk a lot about the bank of mum and dad, but the vast majority of deposits come from people saving every month, perhaps using the Government's new Help to Buy ISA. Stamp duty is not a mortgageable cost. I have spoken to people in my constituency, and many of them say that that extra stretch to pay the stamp duty can put them off buying, perhaps for another year. Unfortunately, house prices will have gone up in that period, meaning that they have to save even more. It becomes a sort of perverse positive feedback loop, with their having to save up for the extra stamp duty meaning that they put off buying for many years.

The only people who would lose out from stamp duty being passed up the chain rather than down it are those at the top who want to downsize. In a lot of cases—

I appreciate that this does not apply to all of them—people who are downsizing have significant built-up equity that they have accrued from buying their present property perhaps 20 or 30 years previously. I hope that as we have this debate about how we can encourage first-time buyers, the Government will look at that proposal.

Finally, let me say that I support all the plans to tackle rogue landlords. In my constituency, an area of low demand, we have a problem with rogue landlords, so some of the provisions in the Bill are most welcome. I just appeal to local authorities across the country, particularly those in my area, to use not only these powers when the Bill is enacted, but some of the powers already in place to tackle rogue and absentee landlords.

This Bill is an excellent piece of legislation. We have come a very long way, and I look forward to supporting it in Parliament throughout all its stages.

8.25 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), who always looks to defend his constituents well. The points he made about stamp duty are thought-provoking and I appreciate his sharing them with the House.

The need to address the housing crisis in this country has never been greater. Rising demand, a chronic lack of supply and a woeful lack of long-term vision from the Government have ramped up the pressure in every region of the country. I am glad that the Government have brought this Bill to the House for us to examine and that they are finally showing effort to stem the crisis. It is a relief that they have woken up to the urgent need to build more homes, after five years of neglect, when house building fell to some of its lowest peacetime levels on record.

This Bill, however, does nothing to tackle some of the most profound problems the housing sector faces. For so many of my constituents, home ownership must become more affordable and more readily accessible, so that those looking to own a home can take their first step on the ladder. The Government's attempt at solving that is their "starter homes programme", which is at the forefront of this Bill. Anybody taking even a cursory look at the detail will reach a glaring conclusion: the homes are simply not affordable to those on ordinary incomes. Shelter has published information to suggest that families on the Government's new national minimum wage—it is a minimum wage, not a national living wage—will be able to afford a starter home in only 2% of local authority areas. That raises the question: which bracket of the population is the scheme supposed to be assisting? We need genuinely affordable homes, not assistance packages which people who are currently frozen out of housing ownership are not going to be able to get anywhere near.

Although this Bill will do little to make the dream of home ownership a reality for those who want it, my biggest anxiety is that it will deal a fatal blow to social housing. The Bill aggressively promotes starter homes by forcing planning authorities to prioritise them over all other types of housing, such as affordable rented homes and social housing. That approach directly imperils the section 106 obligations of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, measures which in the past decade have secured more than 230,000 affordable homes. Any endangerment of those provisions would be nothing short of a tragic loss of what should be referred to as genuinely affordable homes. Coast & Country, a housing association in my constituency, has just signed a deal with Bellway Homes to provide 13 new affordable rented homes on a site in Redcar. Under the measures in this Bill, those homes risk being side-lined. Maintaining a mix where truly affordable homes are part of developments must be a priority in any solution to the housing crisis.

On right to buy, the implementation of the so-called "voluntary" scheme is at best a poorly thought out policy and at worst a direct block to securing social housing. Housing associations have complained that the concept is flawed. We know from the performance of the earlier model that more than 30% of all homes sold in this way are now controlled by private landlords. Like many of my colleagues, I do not have an ideological problem with right to buy, but I fundamentally disagree with the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who calls us "bourgeois lefties". It is not bourgeois to object to the exploitation of a precious asset—a home—to push up rents and take the aspiration of home ownership further away by reducing supply. That provision will mean higher rents and higher spending on housing benefit, producing the worst outcome for tenants, housing associations and the Exchequer, as well as a catastrophic depletion of social housing stock, which will effectively be lost for ever.

Just as concerning is the costing. How is the voluntary right to buy scheme being funded? As the Institute for Fiscal Studies points out, the scheme has serious up-front costs, because housing associations will have to be compensated for sales below market value. The National Housing Federation estimates that if all of the eligible households decide to take up the scheme, it could cost an astonishing £11.6 billion. Even a casual analysis reveals a serious imbalance between the money going out to fully compensate the housing associations and the money we have been told is going to fund it, which will come from councils selling their most expensive properties as they become available. That scheme is estimated to raise about £4.5 billion.

We are barely six months beyond the election, and already we on the Labour Benches have stopped expecting the Government's maths to add up. Clearly, ideology trumps economics. Once again, that can be seen in the 1% cut to social rents, which will lead to a £16 million shortfall in the next four years for my housing association in Redcar, thus affecting its broader services, such as tackling antisocial behaviour, supporting financial inclusion, and helping people stay in their homes. All of those services will be cut, shunting more costs on to other aspects of public services. It will also result in considerable job losses to my local housing association, which is one of the best and most secure employers in my constituency, particularly in the current climate.

Finally, I wish to touch on the pay-to-stay mandatory rents for high-income social tenants. This proposal is the latest nonsensical assault on working families that proves just how out of touch this Government are with the reality that thousands of tenants face. If the collective income of a household is £30,000, rents will be increased to market level. For a couple on £15,000 each—not much more than the national minimum wage—the proposal could be a total disincentive to work additional hours

[Anna Turley]

or seek higher paying employment. I ask the Secretary of State to clarify that point and to avoid the Government yet again taking money out of the pockets of hard-working people.

The Secretary of State started his speech today with a noble description of new housing as more than "bricks and mortar". He talked about how the homes we build shape the lives and prosperity of the people who live in them. But why should my constituents give him any credit for such a statement when his Government persist with the wretched bedroom tax? *[Interruption.]* It is all very well for Members on the Government Benches to titter, but thousands of my constituents have been forced out—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I call Mr Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

8.31 pm

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Mr Deputy Speaker, may I thank you for your unprecedented ruling that those of us who are latecomers to this debate will get more time? That is very welcome.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. May I just say that I did not make any changes to the time limits? I inherited the time levels.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I should have perhaps said "the Chair". Mr Deputy Speaker, I am grateful to catch your eye in this debate and I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley).

This is an innovative Bill. It is a big Bill that will bring about a great change. It builds on this party's great tradition of supporting those who aspire to own their own home. A Bill that potentially allows more than 1 million people to buy their own home from housing associations must be a good thing. I have listened carefully to many speeches from Opposition Members who have said that they support the right to buy in principle, but then there is a "but". I cannot understand that, because if they support the right to buy in principle—presumably when a house is owned by the local authority—why do they not support it when a house is owned by a housing association? What difference does it make to tenants? I think this is a good Bill.

I have a difficulty in my constituency in that it probably has the most difficult affordability ratio in the south-west. I sympathise with those areas in London that have an even worse affordability ratio, so I support this Bill's bringing forward more people able to buy their own houses. Above all, though, I support the provision of more affordable houses. I commend to my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning a scheme in my constituency where we use section 106 moneys to allow developers to put in trust to the local authorities part of the equity of the house, so that somebody, particularly a first-time buyer, can buy, say, a 60% ownership of the house and then staircase up to 100% ownership when they can afford it. That seems to be an excellent scheme.

Lots of Members have spoken in detail about the housing provisions in the Bill. As a chartered surveyor—I declare my interests in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—I want to talks about parts 6 and 7 of the Bill, which relate to planning and compulsory purchase. Given that 80% of my constituency is designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty, Members will understand that I have a very difficult planning situation. None the less, I commend my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for introducing the national planning policy framework. It has simplified the planning system and it is beginning to work really well. The problem is that it is a plan-led system, and my local authority, the Cotswold district council, does not have a plan, and it has been using every sort of excuse for why it does not have one. The neighbouring council, Stroud district council, which I partly represent, is about to get its local plan adopted and I congratulate it. I therefore welcome clause 99, which enables the Secretary of State to address the issue that 36% of local authorities do not have a plan. The problem is if an authority does not have a plan, it is subject to speculative developers. I warmly welcome the provisions on neighbourhood plans and making it easier for local communities to produce a local plan saying what type of developments should occur where in their neighbourhood.

I note that clause 102 changes the conditional and full system of planning consents as regards the technical stage and in-principle planning permissions. In Committee, we will need to tease out what will be allowed for the in-principle development and at the technical stage. For example, will a significant increase in housing be allowed at that stage? Clause 105 allows the Secretary of State to take over the planning function from local authorities when too many appeals have been disallowed. That power is fairly draconian and should be used only in sparing circumstances.

Let me move on to the compulsory purchase provisions. All businesses or individuals should, in every respect, be put back through compensation into the position they would have been in had compulsory purchase powers not been used. I appreciate that that is far-reaching, because anyone who can prove blight should be compensated, but everybody who makes a valid claim should expect a high proportion of their money to be paid in advance—about 80%—so businesses that need to purchase other properties can go out and do so. The Bill addresses the issue of interest rates for late payments in compulsory purchase and specifies a margin over base rate of 2%. The standard national conditions of sale usually presume a margin of 4% over base, which is what I would suggest to the Minister.

I serve on the High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Bill Committee and many of the petitioners have said a number of times that if the Government can afford these large infrastructure projects, they can afford to pay generous compensation for those that suffer. I welcome the fact that the Bill consolidates a number of old Acts providing for compulsory purchase powers and I ask the Government to make the provisions generous to those who have been affected by big infrastructure projects. If the Government do that, it will make it easier to build such projects as there will be less controversy.

I warmly welcome the Bill, which contains some very good provisions on housing as well as some good provisions to speed up the planning process. I urge the Minister to ensure that all authorities such as mine get a local plan as soon as possible so that they are not subject to builders submitting speculative applications where we do not want houses.

8.37 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): In north-east Lincolnshire, more than 4,000 people are on the waiting list for a home. Those families need a stable home in which to raise their children. Last year, just 180 properties were built in total in north-east Lincolnshire. If we carry on like that, it will take 24 years to accommodate those 4,000 people. The Bill does not address the underlying cause of the housing crisis in Grimsby.

The Government's policy of selling off housing association stock without guaranteeing that it will be replaced looks set to make the problem worse. I grew up in a council house and believe that people having the opportunity to own their own home is absolutely right. Very few people have a problem with the principle of right to buy; the problem is with replacements and guaranteeing those replacements. The 4,000 constituents on the housing waiting list in my patch will ask whether the proposals in the Bill will mean that they can move into a suitable home sooner or whether they will be waiting even longer. I fear that they will be waiting longer.

Adapted housing is a particularly big issue in my constituency and I have been contacted by several disabled constituents who are not getting a home with the proper facilities that they need. The waiting list for adapting properties to meet disabled residents' need is rising year on year and officials are changing the criteria to try to reduce the waiting lists. I am concerned about how many new properties will be built in the coming years. The Government need to set out clearly how the changes they have made to the local authority grants will affect councils' ability to top up the adaptation grants.

I fear the unintended consequences of the Bill, particularly the impact of the 1% year-on-year cut in social rents. That is great for the people who are living in that accommodation, but it will have a significant negative effect on the services and support currently offered through local housing associations. Our largest affordable housing provider, Shoreline Housing Partnership, has just begun consultation on shedding 17% of the jobs of the people it employs. I cannot believe that putting 43 people out of work in my constituency is part of the so-called long-term economic plan. We are already the constituency with the 17th highest unemployment in the whole country. To echo the points made by the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), this will mean cuts to additional services such as specialist crime prevention, sheltered housing, and tenancy support schemes needed by vulnerable tenants who often live in deprived areas.

The Bill includes measures aimed at encouraging development on brownfield sites, but in Grimsby most of our brownfield sites are situated on marshland. Any new developments on those sites have to be fitted with more expensive foundations and sufficient safeguards to protect against flooding. That means that the cost to housing associations for any replacement housing is 30% higher than regular costs. In addition, the low land and property values mean that accessing housing growth partnership funding is nearly impossible. Are the Government planning to make extra funding available to housing associations that need to make up the additional costs to developers? If not, our town will see a reduction in affordable housing as a direct result of the measures in this Bill.

8.41 pm

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn). I applaud her passion on behalf of her constituents, but I suspect that our analyses of the Bill will be somewhat different.

I welcome this Bill. There are moral and economic imperatives for it, and it has very ambitious and wide-ranging aims. The Government have rightly identified productivity as

"the challenge of our time"

and have the aim

"that Britain becomes the richest of all the major economies by 2030".

A major part of solving the productivity puzzle is the need to build more homes that people can afford to live in. I welcome this Government's commitment to building 1 million homes by 2020. As we have heard from Members in all parts of the House, people want to own their own homes. Indeed, 86% of our fellow countrymen aspire to home ownership. Our population is ageing and growing, with more and more people living on their own. If we want people to be able to have a home of their own, it is absolutely vital that we build more.

This is a very wide-ranging Bill and other Members wish to speak, so I will limit my comments to reform of the planning system, particularly the aspects relating to brownfield sites. That reform was well overdue, as has been rehearsed in this debate, and what happened during the previous Parliament was very welcome. Before I came to this place, I practised as a property lawyer for 15 years, and then in my family's property business, and I have seen at first-hand the delays that can occur because of the logjams put into the system through planning policies that are not implemented properly.

I am in no way advocating a "no holds barred, build anywhere" planning approach. The Bill's provisions on planning strike a good balance between realising that we must have local planning, even down to neighbourhood level, and recognising that there are cases where central Government need to act to break logjams in the planning system. We all know places where local authorities do not have a local plan in place and may not have agreed one for many years. That often means that they are then prey to developers in the appeals process. Some councils have local plans that are up to 20 years old and take no account of the changing demographics of an area. It is absolutely essential that we rectify this situation. I welcome the powers in the Bill whereby the Secretary of State can expedite the agreement of local plans. I hope that the Minister can confirm that the new regulations will not unduly stretch the resources of planning departments.

The clauses of particular interest to me are 102 and 103, which relate to brownfield sites, because our business specialised in building on brownfield sites for both residential and commercial properties. It is a difficult process and all of us have recognised that it is a lot more expensive for developers to decontaminate land, rather than building on a green field.

Jake Berry: My hon. Friend spoke earlier about productivity in the building industry. Given her experience in this area, does she accept that development of brownfield land would create an opportunity for modular construction because of the ability to build on a concrete slab, which minimises the amount of decontamination required? Is this not a great way of driving more productivity in the construction industry, particularly through brownfield developments?

Seema Kennedy: That depends on the land. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) spoke about marshland. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. It depends on the nature of the land, the flooding risk and the sort of contaminants present.

There is a great moral imperative to build on brownfield sites. I have the great fortune to have grown up in, done my building in, and now represent, as Mr Deputy Speaker will agree, part of the most beautiful county in our country—Lancashire. In Lancashire industrial towns lie adjacent to stunning countryside. We want to protect these green spaces. I know from personal experience that it can be done. As I have said, it is time consuming and can be expensive. It depends on the nature of the contamination and what is to be built, but more and more specialist companies are coming down the line with expertise in this area, which means that costs have come down and will continue to do so. The Campaign to Protect Rural England has estimated that nearly a million homes can be built on brownfield land in England. This means that not only will our green belt be protected, but as the land has already been developed, there will be at least some infrastructure already in place.

I hope the clauses dealing with the system of "permission in principle", which is similar to the zonal system in the US, will speed up the development of brownfield sites and contribute towards the aim of 1 million homes.

I particularly welcome the requirement for local planning authorities to have a statutory register of land, which should make it easier for developers and builders to identify brownfield sites and also give local people a sense of ownership, and reassurance that while homes are being built locally their beautiful green spaces are being protected. I would be interested to hear from the Minister whether he agrees with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors that, along with the proposed measures, there should be a brownfield map—my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena) referred to this—which includes privately owned brownfield land.

It is incumbent on us to speed up house building. If we want more people to own their homes and the prices of homes to go down, the ambitious aims of the Bill will help to achieve that and I will support it as it makes progress through this place.

8.47 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I represent an inner London constituency. It is the most overcrowded in the country. We have very little green space. We love the little bit that we have, but all our development sites are brownfield sites. Despite the coffee bars and the Georgian squares, we have the third worst child poverty statistics in the whole country, and the gap between rich and poor is getting worse. Many of our problems arise from housing. Will the Bill help my constituency? No, it will not.

The Bill will damage the supply of affordable homes across the country, and in Islington its effects will be particularly severe. Much has been said about forcing local authorities to sell the higher-value homes. I have a great deal to say about that, but in the time available I will not do so today. I have much to say about the effects of a policy whereby an ordinary three-bedroom council flat would cost £520,000.

The Government ask rhetorically why higher earners should live in social housing at subsidised rent, and presumably it could be asked why higher earners should be subsidised to buy. The answer is that without a subsidy it is not affordable, but what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. High earners are defined as households earning £40,000. In some areas where social rent is only 50% below market rent, the hike in rents would be hard to meet, but not necessarily impossible. In Islington, where private rents are more than 200% higher than social rents, this creates a major problem. Shelter has said that London renters need an income of £70,000 to make ends meet. What would happen to a Londoner who lives in a household with an income of between £40,000 and £70,000? What would happen to that group of people?

For example, what would the Chancellor say to a constituent of mine? She is a single parent of three and earns £32,000. Her eldest boy is about to start work at a fast food restaurant on the minimum wage, so he will take home £10,000. What would he counsel her to do—to tell the boy not to work, because otherwise their rent will double? This is not a policy of a party that calls itself the party of the workers. He cannot leave home, because there is no affordable housing available for fit young men, so what should the family do? The Minister should remember that we have 19,000 people on the housing waiting list in my constituency.

The second ill-thought-through policy is on starter homes. As I understand it, starter homes involve a subsidy of at least 20% for new homes for first-time buyers, and the homes must not cost the starter more than £450,000. How does that apply in the real world of my constituency? Let me explain. In Islington, we build about 1,500 new homes. That is pretty good going as we do not have a lot of space. At the moment, the biggest development is the 1,000 homes being built at City Road Basin, but a one-bedroom flat there will cost £860,000. Is that an appropriate starter home?

What is the answer? Should we have no starter homes—should we ignore a development of such a scale, and say that it should have no affordable homes of any sort—or should we put in a subsidy? The Government intend to put in a subsidy of at least 20%, but to bring the price down below £450,000, the person buying the home would presumably get a 50% discount. That will be pretty lucky for them when they sell it in five years' time, because they would make a profit of at least £400,000. I must say that I do not criticise the person who would take advantage of that, but is there not a better way of spending money on affordable housing in somewhere such as Islington, which has 19,000 families on the waiting list and the third worst child poverty statistics in the country?

The truth is that in order to pay for a £450,000 flat, we are talking of a household income of about £100,000, with £100,000 of savings for a deposit if the household cannot get a 95% mortgage. The fact is that such people are already at the top of the list. They will already be in a position where they could buy a flat, so why are we giving them such huge assistance when we have such a housing crisis? I would be terribly grateful to the Minister if he listened to me, because I am trying to measure the Tory rhetoric against the reality for those whom I represent.

As I now have the time, let me say something about the sell-off of housing in my constituency. Housing associations will be forced to sell their housing. Will that be replaced within my constituency, or will housing associations simply take the money and run and build elsewhere? When my local authority is forced to sell off all new build that is being built in my constituency, what will happen? Will the Minister say how many social housing flats will be left in Islington in five years' time? Frankly, the only affordable housing in a constituency such as mine is social housing for rent, because prices are so high that no one on an average income could live in an area such as mine without the assistance of social housing.

We have already had the nonsense of the Mayor of London saying that 80% of market rent is affordable; it is not affordable. With the new planning regulations and the priority being given to the new starter homes, the problem now is that no other forms of real affordable housing will be available in my constituency.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that fully mutual co-ops are a particular strand of all this? I have a very large number of them in my constituency. If they are not exempted from all three really difficult policies, the Bill will, quite honestly, crucify all our co-ops.

Emily Thornberry: I had not thought of that very serious point. I must say that that is another point on which we should get an answer from the Minister.

If the only affordable housing on brownfield sites that we have are these extraordinary starter homes—of up to the amounts that they are selling for, for the sort of people I have identified—for which planning permission must be granted, how is my local authority ever going to get the 19,000 families on the housing list into any form of affordable home? It is no wonder that the housing benefit bill is going to continue to go up in London. In the last five years under the coalition Government, it went up from £5.3 billion to £6.1 billion. How much worse will it get before the Government start taking seriously the idea that affordable homes in central London need to be social rented housing? There is nothing in the Bill that promotes social rented housing—affordable housing for my constituents.

About 40% of my constituents live in social housing. Where will their children go? They were born and brought up in Islington. Should they not be allowed to remain in the communities in which they were born? It is not fair.

This Bill is unfair. It does not look at the reality of inner London and it ought to.

8.55 pm

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I support the Bill, which clearly has one ambition: to increase the supply of homes in this country—homes that are affordable to buy and affordable to rent. As such, it builds on the legislation that was passed in the last Parliament and seeks to address long-term problems.

As the Secretary of State rightly pointed out, the high point of house building in the last three decades was in 1988 and the low point in 2010. The number of homeowners in this country peaked in 2003 and has declined since. The Labour party presided over that decline for seven years without giving any answers to the problem. It is clear from the debate today that it still has no answers to the problem. On the challenge of affordable homes for social rent, which many Labour Members have touched on, the Labour party has set out no solution in this debate. If there is a vast sum of money that it has found or that it would print to support its policy, we would like to hear about it, but as of yet, nothing has been said.

While I support the measures in the Bill, I will talk in the short time I have about the need for a revolution in the design and delivery of affordable homes to buy and rent in this country. I will look at the developing methods for the off-site construction of homes that can then be assembled. It is, if you like, a modern form of prefabrication. The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) touched on the Y:Cube project in her constituency, which the Minister has visited. I believe that this could be an exciting concept for the future.

I recently met the architectural practice, Rogers Stirk Harbour and Partners, that designed the concept that was launched in Merton in September. It can design and build flats that can be rented out at 65% of market rent. It has a build cost per unit of about £35,000. The units can be rented out at about £150 a week. They are well insulated and well designed, so the energy costs can be as little as £10 a month. That is a massively different proposition from the costs associated with many new homes that are delivered to buy or rent in London and across the country.

The construction costs and times are substantially lower. The practice that developed the concept believes that it can take a new development of 50 flats from planning application through to people living in the block within 11 months. The usual time is more than 30 months for a development using the normal practices and methods. The assembly time for a unit in the factory can be as little as a week and the assembly time on site can be as little as a week as well.

This method clearly has the ability to deliver large numbers of properties at very affordable prices, very quickly. It can also utilise pockets of land, many of which are owned by local authorities, Transport for London or the Government, that are not attractive to commercial developers because of their size. Such flats or houses can be assembled off-site and then constructed on-site very quickly in small areas of land that would be uneconomical or difficult to construct in for traditional builders.

I know that the Minister has looked at this work in London, the site in Lewisham that the practice is looking to develop and at the modular construction concepts that have been developed in Manchester by Urban Splash. Is there more that we could do to incentivise this method of constructing new homes? Could there be further fast-tracking through the planning system to acknowledge the low level of disruption to local residents of constructing homes in this way? Could we look at the use of Government land to support such projects?

[Damian Collins]

One of the great advantages of the off-site manufacturing process that I have looked at is that not only can the homes be brought in very easily, but they can be moved in the future. If the owner of a piece of land is not certain that they can commit to a residential development because it might have a higher commercial value in the future, they might commit to the construction of modular homes for 10 years or so which could be moved to a different location in the future. This very exciting concept could also sit alongside large developments. It is not unusual for a large commercial development scheme to take about 10 years to build, so modular units could also be constructed during part of that time.

These are not just temporary homes. As well as meeting all the building specifications for a normal build, they have an active life of 60 years and are mortgageable. Their purchase price could be as little as £50,000 or £60,000, and that is in London, not to mention elsewhere in the country. I believe they have the potential to revolutionise the delivery of affordable homes and they deserve greater scrutiny.

In the little time I have left, I want to touch on clause 103 and the list of prescribed brownfield sites, which has been addressed by other Members. Could the Government give guidance to local authorities that have brownfield sites with no existing or derelict buildings on them? It could be contaminated industrial land that is just sitting there because there is no requirement for it to be restored. Could land that was formerly used for industrial purposes, is not used for anything now and does not have any existing buildings on it be included on the list of prescribed brownfield sites? If the Minister could give me guidance on that when he winds up or at another time, that would be welcome.

I support the Bill, whose clear purpose is to increase the supply of affordable homes to buy and rent.

9.1 pm

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): May I say from the outset that I am grateful to Shelter for providing the information that enables me to take part in this debate? Few housing sector organisations have as much experience as Shelter in the matters addressed by the Bill, so it is well worth paying a good deal of attention to what it has to say. I act vicariously without speaking with its authorisation. It is fair to say that Shelter is concerned that, as currently drafted, the Housing and Planning Bill will unintentionally reduce the supply of affordable housing, although I think it is being very generous in its assessment by using the word "unintentional".

First, I want to address the circumstances of families who face housing difficulties. Families who are unable to buy or access social housing may have no option but to live in the private rented sector, which is in need of urgent reform because it is not fully fit for purpose. The private rented sector is no longer the preserve of students and mobile professionals. There are now 11 million private renters in England, and one in four families in England is renting privately. Rising demand and a lack of supply are driving up the cost of renting. Sadly, a minority of landlords are exploiting the situation and renting out properties that are not in a decent condition.

Secondly, private renters are paying too much and are living in increasingly worse conditions. England's private renters are spending a staggering 47% of their income on rent. The comparable figure for those with a mortgage is 23%, while for social tenants it is 32%. Nearly 30% of private rented properties in England would fail the Government's own decent homes standard, compared with only 20% of owner-occupied properties. Some landlords know that either they will find tenants desperate enough to accept poor conditions, or they will rely on the fact that if tenants complain, local authorities do not always have the power or resource to take action.

The Bill contains proposals to crack down on some rogue landlords, but more can be done. The proposals could be strengthened to give a strong and clear signal to rogue landlords that renting out properties that are in a poor condition will not be tolerated. The message is simple: stop exploiting people's vulnerability.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend also accept that a small number of private landlords—this is certainly the case in my constituency and, I suspect, in his—use the private rented sector to launder the proceeds of crime?

Peter Dowd: All sorts of things start to come out of the woodwork when we look at the issues. The Government have to look carefully at the issue raised by my right hon. Friend.

Banning poor landlords from renting out properties is one thing, but breaching a banning order is another and it should be made a criminal offence.

Thirdly, as well as cracking down on rogue landlords, we have an opportunity to take a common sense approach to reform in order to protect renters and improve conditions. As a former chair of Merseyside fire and rescue service for many years, I am acutely aware of the impact of fire deaths and injuries on victims and their families. In 2013-14, there were 49 deaths as a result of electrical fires in homes—an increase on the previous year. The Government have an opportunity to bring that dreadful statistic down by introducing mandatory electrical safety checks. A simple change in the law would require private landlords to carry out electrical safety checks every five years. As has been mentioned earlier, the law already requires carbon monoxide checks. Behind every statistic is a person, a family, a life.

Shelter heard from a private renter who encountered dangerous problems in her flat as soon as she moved in a couple of years ago. She found the property was so dangerous she was at risk of electrocution. She said:

> "During my first week living in the flat, I put my foot through the rotten kitchen floorboards. My landlord's response was to put a bit of plywood over it. In addition to the hole in the rotten kitchen floorboards, I had water coming in through the electric extractor fan in the bathroom ceiling every time it rained. The ceiling around the electric extractor fan was perishing, there were leaks under the kitchen sink, under the bathroom washbasin and from a neighbouring property."

She was told by the council that it was unambiguously dangerous.

That brings me to my fourth point. With almost half of renters—in my constituency, that amounts to about 3,000 renters—saying they have had problems with poor conditions or disrepair in the last year, we need to empower them to take action against landlords renting out unfit properties. My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) has a private Member's Bill seeking to reform the fitness for human habitation requirement. If her Bill does not succeed, or is talked out like the Hospital Parking Charges (Exemption for Carers) Bill, the Housing and Planning Bill will be another great opportunity to bring in this crucial reform. It would require a landlord to ensure that properties are fit for human habitation at the start of each tenancy and throughout the tenancy. The current systems—the housing health and safety rating system and the statutory repairing obligation—set out what condition a property should be in and what the responsibility of the landlord is, but they rely on overstretched local authorities first investigating the tenant's complaint and secondly taking the appropriate action.

There are three practical measures the Government could and should introduce: first, change the law so that landlords are required to carry out five-yearly electrical safety checks—to be fair, many landlords already do this as a matter of course; secondly, reform existing law so that all private properties are required to be fit for human habitation—a dreadful demand to have to make in the 21st century; and thirdly, enhance the rent repayment orders process by removing barriers to renters exercising their right by making landlords bear tenants' fees.

Finally, I have heard comments tonight about brownfield sites. I could draw a circle around my constituency, and that would be a brownfield site. The idea of having a slab of concrete and putting a house on it would horrify most people in my constituency. It is not just about the industrial heritage. Many houses were built in a gerrymandered fashion, and the stuff used for the foundations was the cause of the contamination. We cannot just solve problems with a slab of concrete.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I have to reduce the time limit to five minutes, and I might have to reduce it further if we have more interventions.

9.8 pm

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I have a shareholding in a small communications company that I set up before I was elected to this place and which gives advice to, and sometimes opposes, developers, including in respect of public consultation.

I thank the Minister for Housing and Planning, my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis), and the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), for having visited my constituency in the last year. The Housing and Planning Minister met constituents of mine who were having difficulty with their development—something I will talk about in a moment.

I am also chairman of both the all-party parliamentary group for excellence in the built environment and the APPG for the private rented sector. The built environment APPG is undertaking an inquiry into the quality of design, while the private rented APPG is holding one into energy efficiency. I would like to point out that I am one of the few Conservative Members who represents a totally urban, inner-city constituency.

I very much welcome the Government's target to build 200,000 new starter homes over the next five years, but to deliver it we need not only enough brickies, plumbers and electricians in the industry, but a speedier planning system. This means better public consultation and forcing developers to build the new homes fairly quickly once they have been granted planning permission. As I have said, I think that if the development is not brought forward within six months of a brownfield site being granted planning permission, business rates should have to be paid on the site.

Working commercially, I worked on a number projects that failed to get planning permission, partly because the client did not take any notice of what I was saying and also because they did not gain local community support. We need more master planning of developments. Taking local communities with us will, I firmly believe, quicken the granting of planning permission.

I am also a champion of what we are doing on the APPG for the built environment. We are going to have an inquiry into the quality of design, because I have had a number of constituents who have had problems with their new-build homes in my Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport constituency.

Buying a first home is probably the largest investment someone will make in their life. It is the first rung on the housing ladder and being part of the property-owning democracy. People expect the new home to be in tip-top condition and, being new, one would expect the various authorities to have checked it to ensure there will be no problems for a significant amount of time. People do not necessarily think that they need to have it surveyed before handing over the cash, as they expect the local council to have done its job.

Imagine, therefore, discovering a few months or a couple of years later that there are some difficulties. One would certainly not expect to have to produce a list of problems, as one of my constituents did—and it went on for three pages. While I very much welcome the Government's investment into new-build at Devonport, I have been appalled at the brown stains that are already appearing on the outside walls of these new homes. Earlier today, I met the Royal Institute of British Architects, which wants to have equality of space, so that people can live in developments that have a suitable amount of space. While I was doing a project in the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea, I was made very aware of the importance of children having space to do homework rather than having to share a kitchen-diner with their siblings.

Let me deal with the private rented sector. It is important to ensure that this sector delivers good quality housing to rent. If people are renting from housing benefit landlords who are not delivering housing of the appropriate quality, those landlords should be struck off the list immediately. In my opinion, this Bill is very much about making sure that we have suitable quality homes for today that will not become the slums of the future.

9.13 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): We have already heard from my hon. Friends about the negative impact of these proposals on social housing and their illogical nature. These points are well made, and I suspect that some Conservative Members will worry about the dangers ahead. I hope they will ask the Government to think again.

[Daniel Zeichner]

When the Government published the Bill, they said they wanted to transform generation rent into generation buy, but in reality they are creating generation get-by. For young people, this promises a bleak future, struggling to find a home of their own, and too often having to rely on parents either for a place to stay or for finance. That is bad for those young people, and often puts huge strains on families.

Some of these proposals make good quick-fix headlines, but their long-term effects will do real damage to our housing stock and to communities. Most damaging for cities such as Cambridge is this compulsion on councils to sell off their high-value vacant properties and hand over the revenue to the Treasury. This not only completely undercuts the principle of self-financing and the ability of councils to invest in new housing, but is a disgraceful broken promise to boot.

Cambridge city council spent years painstakingly piloting and then working up a long-term strategy to put their housing finances on a strong, sustainable footing. I know, because I helped persuade my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper)when she was Housing Minister to include Cambridge in the pilot over a decade ago. It took years to come to fruition, because housing finance is fiendishly complex, but it was finally settled, and it enabled Cambridge to develop a business plan stretching over three decades that would provide housing management services, maintain the stock in decent condition, and enable money to be invested in new affordable housing. The Bill, and the cut in rents proposed in the Welfare Reform and Work Bill, are combining to scupper all that hard work. In fact, they are violating what could well be considered to be a formal contract, and I would welcome an explanation from the Minister when he sums up the debate.

Cambridge county council and other authorities bought out their housing debt on the basis of careful forward planning, but that is now in ruins because of a rash, irresponsible change of policy that puts future financial planning in jeopardy—and this from a party that has the nerve to claim financial competence. It is worth noting that, whether the Government are stunning environmental investors with sudden about-turn policy changes on feed-in tariffs or investment institutions which learn that housing associations are now public bodies, their unpredictable actions are tearing up the rule book and leaving budgets, and promises, in tatters. Incidentally, they are also adding some £60 billion to the national debt. This is incompetence on an heroic scale.

Cambridge city council estimates that the Bill will result directly in the loss of a quarter of our housing stock. Far from securing the city's housing finances, as was planned, the Bill means that the financial projection is for it to go into deficit. That is where the Government's so-called long-term economic plan takes us. What does this tell us about the Government's commitment to localism and long-term thinking? To them, localism seems to mean saying, "You do what you're told, even if we agreed something completely different last year." Rather than hammering on with their catchphrases and soundbites, the Government should be hammering walls, and helping local authorities to build the genuinely affordable homes that are so desperately needed in this country.

Let me end by drawing attention to another pernicious feature of the Bill. The pay-to-stay proposal is about as wrong-headed as any housing policy could be. As will be confirmed by any research and any housing officer, what we need are mixed communities, but that is really hard to achieve. What does this proposal do? It makes it harder. When I look at estates in my city, I see communities strengthened by some wonderful, hard-working local people. I shall not name them, because others know who they are. I do not know how much they earn—nor, interestingly, does the council—but some households in cities such as Cambridge certainly have an annual income of £30,000, and I would pay them to stay. They are worth their weight in gold in their communities, and we should all pay them to stay rather than punishing them and encouraging them to go. What a disastrous policy! And what about the people who put in a few extra hours that take them over the £30,000? They are punished for doing more. This Government are the enemy of aspiration. *[Interruption.]* Think about it.

I sincerely hope that the Government see sense, rethink, and go back to the drawing board in respect of their housing policy. Of course my hopes are not high, because this is only one part of a much wider set of rotten and dangerous proposals. It is part of a package that is billed as reform, but it is not reform. It is vandalism, it is broken promises, and it is a tawdry way in which to run a Government.

9.18 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Let me begin by drawing the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as an elected councillor.

I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State speak about opportunity. Without affordable, decent housing, other opportunities mean little, and there is nothing more natural than people's aspiration to own a home for themselves and their families. That is why it is so important to my constituents that the Government meet their objective of providing 1 million new homes by 2020.

This is a progressive, genuinely one nation Bill. It will help to increase supply while recognising the importance of our local environments, it will help to bring the possibility of home ownership within the reach of more of our constituents, and it will help to restore equity and fairness to housing and planning systems.

Just as in many hon. Members' constituencies, my constituency has seen much development in the past 30 years. Situated on the border of the west midlands and Staffordshire, there is always a risk that more demand for housing will mean development into our green belt. That must be resisted. We must also resist the temptation to build on existing gardens, as previous Governments have done. Instead, the key challenge facing the west midlands is how we bring brownfield land into use, particularly contaminated brownfield land. Bringing such land into use, as Ministers will know, is a core part of the proposals for a west midlands combined authority. There is more than 1,600 hectares of vacant brownfield land in the west midlands, which would go a long way to meeting the extra housing capacity our communities need. The Bill will simplify the process of identifying and using available brownfield sites, alongside the £10 million fund available for councils to use brownfield sites to build new starter homes and the wider £1 billion brownfield regeneration package. It will increase supply, regenerate communities and safeguard our green belt.

Most hon. Members will remember the joy of the first time they picked up the keys to their home, hearing the lock turning in the door for the first time and making the place their own. Why should our constituents not feel the same way? The measures in the Bill are part of a wider package to promote home ownership and to make it more accessible, whether for social tenants or for young people looking to buy their first home, helping people to save for a deposit or to turn their social rent into payments towards their home.

The Bill will help to get Britain building. It will help to release the supply of land and increase the housing our communities need. The Bill will help the Government to meet their aspiration to build the homes our country needs, including 200,000 starter homes. Most importantly, the Bill will help to realise the aspirations of millions of people up and down our country to own a home of their own. I am proud to support the Bill this evening.

9.22 pm

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): We are all agreed in this House that there is a housing crisis in London. Demand massively outstrips supply and house prices are skyrocketing not just in real terms but in comparison to earnings. In my constituency, the median house price to median earnings ratio has increased from 4.83 in 1997 to 11.86 in 2013. With house prices averaging over £600,000, it is not difficult to see why for young people in Kingston home ownership is not a dream long-deferred, but perhaps a dream denied. We want young people to remain in London as a place to live, not just as a place to commute into for work.

The solution to the housing crisis in London—there was no dispute about this in all the hustings I attended before the election—is to build significantly more houses. The Bill provides an impetus for building starter homes and massively increasing home ownership. It is fair to observe, as Opposition and Government Members have, that not everyone will be able to afford starter houses. That is why the Bill is not an all-encompassing solution to London's housing crisis. Starter homes have to be seen as part of a mix of new housing provisions, including schemes such as shared ownership and estate regeneration, something we are embarking on in Kingston.

The question is really this: where are we going to build all these houses? I am pleased that the Bill helps local authorities by identifying brownfield sites. In addition, that must go hand in glove with the work of the London Land Commission that the Mayor has tasked with identifying publicly owned land in London. It saddens me, in going around my constituency to my surgeries, to go past disused publicly owned land when we are crying out for affordable housing and land for primary schools. It is about time that Government Departments and quangos got out of the way and released this land that is lying fallow.

Labour Members have expressed concern that the Bill will lead to a reduction in affordable houses in London, so I will put my name to the amendment tabled by my constituency neighbour and the next Mayor of London, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), to ensure that that does not happen. The amendment will place a duty on the Secretary of State and the Mayor, working with local housing authorities, to achieve at least two units of affordable housing in return for the disposal of each unit of high-value social housing in London. We must ensure that at least two houses are built for every one that is sold, which is why I will be pleased to sign my hon. Friend's amendment.

Peter Dowd: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

James Berry: I am sorry but I will not.

I reject the amendment tabled by the Liberal Democrats—I see that the eighth of the party that proposed it is no longer here—coming as it does from the party that talks a great game on housing and the vulnerable, but fails to deliver. Take the local authority in my constituency. The area was controlled by a Lib Dem council until 2013, yet it has one of the worst records for house building—including affordable house building—in London. What did the leader of Kingston Council until 2014 say about that: "Hindsight is a wonderful thing." I think that is a shameful response to the 6,000 people on council house waiting lists in Kingston, and to young people who have grown up or come to my constituency to go to university but can no longer afford to live there. It is typical of a party that is quick to criticise yet slow to accept criticism.

Whatever the Government's efforts to increase home ownership, it is inevitable that a large number of people will continue to rent. I support the Government's intention to create a rogue landlord and letting agent database, and for London I encourage further devolution of that database to the Mayor, so that it works hand in glove with his efforts to accredit good landlords. I would like the Government to consider in detail the proposal by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Dame Angela Watkinson) to have a database for all landlords and letting agents—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

9.27 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): The Government are right to plan to build 1 million new homes by 2020, to improve access to home ownership—particularly for young people with the building of starter homes—and to seek to speed up the planning system. The target of 1 million new homes is ambitious, and to meet it will be a challenge. To stand a realistic chance of success, it is vital that the Government use all resources at their disposal.

House builders large and small who build homes for sale, and the social sector—whether councils or housing associations—have a vital role. It is important not to forget UK pension funds and insurance companies that want to invest in the market rental sector. They have an increasingly important role to play, and the Government must provide them with a framework to ensure that they can play it to the full.

It is important and right to support people in their aspiration to own their own home, although demographic changes over the past 30 years mean that not everyone wants to buy their home—research shows that 37% of people do not intend to do so. Virtually all build-to-rent activity takes place in urban locations. That means that the sector has an important role in maximising the

[Peter Aldous]

amount of brownfield land that is redeveloped, regenerating derelict areas in towns and cities, and revitalising our high streets.

Peter Dowd: Does the hon. Gentleman know how expensive it is to remediate brownfield sites? It can cost more than £1.5 million per hectare.

Peter Aldous: I was a chartered surveyor for 27 years, and the cost of redeveloping brownfield sites varies significantly around the country. The private sector investment in urban areas has played a role in regenerating Harlem in New York, and there is no reason why it cannot play a role here in the UK. It is being done in Manchester, where the city council has formed a £1 billion partnership with the private sector to build 6,000 homes, mostly for rent over a 10-year period. It is estimated that long-term capital of the order of £50 billion can be attracted to private rented new build in the UK. However, such capital is footloose and if we do not have the right policies so that these homes are built here, that capital will go elsewhere—to Tokyo, Berlin or Sydney.

There are two aspects of this Bill that need to be looked at closely to ensure they do not prevent private build-to-rent from realising its full potential. First, there is a concern that the requirements to include starter homes for sale in all developments could seriously impact on the sector. Thus, I ask the Government to consider granting an exemption from this requirement. There is a concern that the requirement to deliver starter homes as part of larger schemes could damage investment in the private rented sector as fragmented sites are much less appealing to investors.

Secondly, the "permission in principle" proposal in clause 102 is to be welcomed, although it is important to ensure that local communities continue to have a say in decisions that will affect them, and the need for high-quality design must not be overlooked. At present it is proposed that the "permission in principle" is only available to residential developments. While this is a good start, there should be a recognition that, on their own, homes are not enough.

Thriving communities need a mix of activities if they are to be a success. In order to create places where people want to live, there is also a need to have places for them to work, rest and play. Planning policy must reflect this if we wish to avoid the mistakes of the past, when too often housing development has taken place in a vacuum devoid of amenities, facilities and infrastructure.

In summary, the Government are to be commended on their ambition both on the wide range of issues that they are covering in this Bill and the target of 1 million homes. Many such targets have been set over the years and have then invariably been missed. To ensure that this is not another one that falls by the wayside, it will be necessary to use all the tools in the box. This means that the institutional private rented sector must be given every encouragement to work alongside the owner-occupier and social-rented sectors.

9.32 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I am delighted to speak in support of the Bill, which makes housing a key priority for this Government. I was interested that the National Infrastructure Commission also laid out that it is a key priority. Housing is infrastructure. Homes are the physical structures we need for the operation of our society and our economy, but we are not building enough—140,000 homes a year, when we need another 70,000 homes a year.

I wish to take issue with the shadow Secretary of State's numbers. He seemed to think that there had been a decline in the numbers being built. There has actually been a 58% increase in the number of new starts annually since 2008, and starts is the key measure.

I also welcome the Minister's commitment to deliver 1 million homes by 2020, which will have a huge direct and indirect economic benefit. There is a still greater prize: 25% of all people who live in poverty do so because of housing costs and a third of those in poverty live in the private rented sector. We have an opportunity to lift 3 million people out of poverty and give them the pride and security of owning or renting a home of their own.

However, we need to deal with two questions: who is going to build these homes, and where and what will we build? The larger developers are probably building enough homes to provide a return for their shareholders, so it is left to the small and medium-sized house builder to fill the gap, but also to local authorities and housing associations. Small and medium-sized house builders used to build 100,000 homes a year in this country; now they build 18,000 homes. Some 62% of small and medium-sized house builders say finance is their principal concern in their ambition to build more homes. Also, the banks have virtually closed for lending to small and medium-sized developers. The Government have tried to help, through the Housing Growth Partnership and the Builders Finance Fund, but do we need to go further, perhaps by establishing a help to build fund to help SMEs to get back into the market?

Local authorities and housing associations used to build 100,000 homes a year, but they are currently building only about 25,000. I believe that the extension of the right to buy will deliver more homes, as does the Chartered Institute of Housing, which believes that it will increase the number of homes sold and delivered by 30,000 a year over the next five years. Housing is infrastructure, and we have committed to spending £100 billion on infrastructure by 2020. If we were to allow just a small portion of that—a £2.5 billion annual grant—to be used for house building, we could deliver up to 120,000 new homes.

Where would we build those homes? Ideally, we would build them on brownfield land. There is to be a move towards a register of brownfield land, but I would suggest the establishment of a national land commission and a national register of brownfield land. We cannot build all those homes on brownfield land, however. Such building is complex: it requires remediation, there can be access difficulties and it is expensive.

So we also need to reform the planning process, which is slow and often under-resourced. The move towards compulsory local plans by 2017 and requiring local authorities to make more timely and more appropriate decisions is absolutely right, as is the granting of "permission in principle" for brownfield sites and for sites allocated to the local plan and the neighbourhood plan. We need developments that will meet local and national needs, and designs that we can be proud of which will improve the lives of those who live in them.

9.36 pm

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I, too, draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I very much welcome the Bill, which comes in the finest Conservative tradition, going back to the days of Harold Macmillan. It is telling that the last five or six speeches have come from the Conservative Benches. Labour Members appeared to run out of steam some time ago. The Liberal Democrats appear to have done so some time before that.

The reason that we are facing this housing problem is that our population is growing rapidly, at a rate of 400,000 a year, mostly driven by immigration. That means that we need to build a couple of hundred thousand houses a year simply to keep pace with population growth. The shadow Minister, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), made some disparaging comments at the beginning of the debate about the Government's record, but I would like to say that their record in this area is an extremely fine one. Indeed, during the right hon. Gentleman's last year as Housing Minister, only 124,000 housing units were started across the United Kingdom, whereas in this past year, the figure had increased to 165,000 units. That is an increase of nearly 50%, of which the Government can be proud. As Mayor of London, my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)—*[Interruption.]* Yes, wake up! My hon. Friend has delivered 94,000 affordable homes during his mayoralty, outstripping his predecessor, the former Member for Brent East. So we have a record that we can be proud of.

The measures in the Bill on planning will enable the Government to go further by ensuring that the recalcitrant 35% of local authorities that have not delivered a local plan will do so by 2017. That will allow developers involved in minor applications, as well as those involved in major ones, to go straight to the planning inspector if they get a poor performance. There will also be a requirement for 90% of brownfield land to have outline planning permission by 2020. All those measures will increase supply.

Opposition Members spoke a great deal about affordability, and they were quite right to do so. There is a problem of affordability in London and across the UK, but the solution is quite simply to build more houses. That is basic economics, and the Bill has at its heart an intention to build more houses. As a London Member of Parliament, I particularly welcome the work of the London Land Commission, which is jointly chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip and the Minister for Housing and Planning, which first met on 16 July this year. Their intention is to match the achievement of the Greater London Authority; 98% of its land has been brought forward for development and the LLC aims to do the same with other public sector land, including the 6,000 acres owned by Transport for London. I ask the Minister to consider going further and allowing the LLC to have more proactive powers to bring forward land for development itself, rather than simply identifying it.

I know that you are keen for me to sit down relatively soon in order to create room for the Front Benchers, Mr Speaker—[Hon. Members: "More"] Members are very kind. Let me briefly first endorse the social housing right to buy concept. Home ownership is a fundamentally good thing. It enables people to have a stake in our society and to invest in their own home. It enables them to prosper as house values goes up. Our proposal is a good one. Social housing providers have committed to replacing the units sold on a one-for-one basis, so this idea that social housing stock will get eroded is simply untrue. The total stock of housing will increase, because the social housing unit that has been sold will still be in existence. This Bill will increase the supply of housing and increase home ownership, and I encourage all Members to support it in the Lobby.

9.40 pm

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): This has been a very interesting debate on the Bill, with an unofficial London mayoral hustings thrown in for good measure. We can clearly see how important housing is for Members from the fact that 48 Back Benchers took part in this debate. The hon. Members for Hornchurch and Upminster (Dame Angela Watkinson) and for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), and the hon. Members for Kensington (Victoria Borwick), for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) and for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) made a number of interesting suggestions as to how to make the Bill's proposals on the private rented sector and starter homes more effective, to negate some of the more centralising aspects of the Bill and to improve the quality of housing that is built. I hope we hear more from them in Committee.

Not surprisingly, given the severity of the housing crisis in London, we heard from a number of London MPs, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), my hon. Friends the Members for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) and for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), and my hon. Friends the Members for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), and for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry). They raised their concerns about how measures in the Bill will not deliver more genuinely affordable homes, will further socially segregate communities and will leave too many Londoners in high-cost, private rented housing with little hope of ever owning a home in the area in which they wish to live.

A number of Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), and my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt), for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds), for Workington (Sue Hayman), for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), for Redcar (Anna Turley), for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), for Bootle (Peter Dowd) and for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), provided a very effective challenge to what the hon.

[Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods]

Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) said about housing problems existing only in London. They spoke up strongly on behalf of their constituents, saying that more good quality, genuinely affordable housing in properly planned and mixed communities based on local decision making is needed everywhere and that the Bill represents an attack on social housing and does little to make home ownership a reality for many people on low and middle incomes.

As Members from across the House are well aware, we are facing a housing crisis in this country. We have the lowest level of home building since the 1920s, completions have fallen off a cliff edge since 2010 and the housing benefit bill is ever increasing. We have seen five years of failure from the Government, and on the basis of this Bill I fear that we are about to see five more. Home ownership has fallen every year since 2010, declining by more than 200,000, whereas under Labour the number of homeowners increased by 1 million. Between 1997 and 2010, we built almost 2 million homes. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) pointed out, in the year with the lowest number of homes built under Labour, 2009, we still built 125,000 homes. That is still more than were built in the year with the highest number of homes built under the Tories, which was 2014, when there were just 117,000 completions. Last year, the Tories built the fewest affordable homes for more than two decades—fewer than 11,000 homes for social rent compared with 33,000 in Labour's last year in office.

Spending on housing benefit has risen by £4.4 billion since 2010, because of ever increasing rents. It is the same old Tory story: a 36% increase in homelessness and a massive increase in rough sleeping.

Boris Johnson *rose*—

Dr Blackman-Woods: I am sorry, I would normally give way to the hon. Gentleman, but we are very short of time.

At least we on the Labour Benches recognise the scale of the task at hand. Current rates of house building in England are running at about half the level needed to meet existing and anticipated demand. We need to deliver an average of 240,000 to 245,000 homes per annum, of which 78,000 must be in the social sector, to meet housing need. That is a very long way from where we are at present, and measures in this Bill do little to address the task at hand.

Looking at right to buy, Labour is not against measures that would increase access to home ownership, but we have always said that the extension of the right-to-buy scheme to housing associations funded by the mass forced sale of affordable council homes is unworkable and wrong. It would lead to a severe and irreversible loss of affordable homes at a time when they are most needed, because there is no plan for a genuine one-to-one, like-for-like replacement.

According to figures estimated by Shelter, 19,000 council homes could be sold by 2020, with a further 113,000 at risk. In fact, since 2012, only one in nine council homes sold under the existing right-to-buy scheme has been replaced, so we can only estimate that the loss of socially rented stock will be substantial, with high-need areas of the country especially badly affected. The right-to-buy policy also leaves many questions unanswered, including whether all 1.3 million tenants will get the right to buy next year as promised.

We do of course also welcome the principle behind starter homes allowing those who can afford to do so to climb on to the property ladder. However, they are not, and should not be, a substitute for low-rent affordable housing. The proposals in the Bill to change planning obligations under section 106 agreements to prioritise the delivery of starter homes means that they will simply replace the building of affordable rented housing.

There is a further problem with the starter home proposals. Put simply, starter homes are not affordable for many, even by the Chancellor's own standards. A family living on the Chancellor's new minimum wage of £9 an hour in 2020 would not be able to afford a starter home in 98% of the country.

The pay-to-stay measure to charge higher rents to some tenants is also extremely problematic. The very idea that a household income of £30,000 outside London, or £40,000 in London, is high is questionable at best, but as the income needed to sustain a basic standard of living varies hugely by household type—for example more income being needed for a family with two children than a single person—the proposals are ludicrous. We know from the Government's own consultation that we are not the only people to think so. The Government's 2013 consultation on pay to stay found that, even with much higher threshold levels, only 25% of respondents were in favour of the policy.

Labour supports measures in the Bill to crack down on rogue landlords and letting agents, but they fall far short of ensuring that England's 11 million renters have a more secure, affordable home.

We wish to thank the Minister for adopting some of our proposals from the Lyons review, and the measures to speed up neighbourhood planning, to require local plans to be made, to streamline the compulsory purchase system and to prioritise building on brownfield land are to be welcomed. We have concerns about wider changes to the planning system and we will raise questions on them in Committee.

This Bill should be a Bill to tackle a crisis faced by thousands—a crisis in which people cannot afford a home, can barely afford their rents and, in the worst cases, are sleeping rough because they simply do not have a home. Instead, this Bill is an all-out assault on social housing, a smash and grab on council stock and a power steal from local authorities and councils. Under the previous Labour Government, home ownership increased, but it is falling now. The Bill does nothing to address five years of failure; indeed, it does not detail how a single affordable home will be built. Frankly, I am appalled that the Bill, which has 106 pages, does not mention homelessness once. We need a Bill that will increase the number of homes built across all tenures and I urge colleagues to vote for our reasoned amendment.

9.50 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): I apologise now to the many colleagues—48 of them—who have spoken today as I will not necessarily get time this evening to mention everything that was said. It was a real indication of the strength of feeling.

I was particularly pleased to note how many Government Members spoke whereas Labour ran out of speakers, which is indicative of where we are. That shows our strength of feeling and backs up our desire and determination to deliver the homes our country needs, as we showed by putting home building and home ownership at the forefront of our manifesto, the Queen's Speech and this Bill. We are building to take our country forward, picking up from the legacy left by Labour. Despite the claims made by the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) earlier, we must remember that when he was Minister for Housing there were just 88,000 housing starts. That was the base from which we had to rebuild.

I had high hopes when I started to read the reasoned amendment, as it started quite well. Unfortunately, it very quickly went downhill from there. I am delighted that the whole House has seen the right hon. Gentleman and other Members from all parties support our plans to tackle rogue landlords and letting agents. They say that negotiations should always start from the point at which the parties agree, so if the House grants the Bill a Second Reading tonight I look forward to warm and welcoming words for these measures in Committee and, I hope, some rather warmer words than those we heard today.

Members on both sides of the House have made strong speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Dame Angela Watkinson) outlined a strong argument, showing her passion about ensuring transparency in the lettings sector by finding information about landlords through council tax forms to protect tenants. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), the next Conservative Mayor of London, rightly outlined his plans to ensure that we continue to deliver more homes for London than previous Labour Mayors, building on the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) who, as Mayor, has delivered for London and exceeded the targets he has set himself.

I look forward to seeing the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park will do over the next few weeks to ensure that we take things forward, working together. He has shown the difference between us and the Opposition, who have carped and moaned about the Bill without offering a single positive suggestion for what they would do for the housing market. My hon. Friends, exemplified by the next Conservative Mayor of London, have outlined a positive message for taking the housing market forward.

My neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon), showed his passion for, and knowledge of, delivering the homes we need and seeing a growth in the custom-build and self-build sector. He outlined the importance of delivering for customers, the residents who buy and live in these homes. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), the former Housing Minister, rightly outlined the importance of local authorities ensuring that they focus on their planning team. Those teams are vital to a local authority's ability to deliver for the future and for local areas, ensuring that they are the heartbeat and economic regeneration driver of the council.

Kate Hoey: The Minister will know that I have the greatest concentration of fully mutual co-ops in my constituency, which is just across the river. Tonight, they all met at Coin Street, and they are very worried. Will the Minister assure me that fully mutual co-ops will be exempt from the right to buy, that he will work to ensure that they are exempt from the reduction in rent, which will destroy co-ops, and that they are exempt from pay to stay? That is really important, as people are really worried and we should ensure that mutual co-ops continue.

Brandon Lewis: Co-operative properties are among the categories for which housing associations can exercise their discretion not to sell their property to tenants. In the agreement, such tenants would potentially be able to use the new ability to have a portable discount that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State outlined earlier.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) rightly talked about the importance of infrastructure in making sure that we are delivering to communities the infrastructure they need for the future. I appreciate and agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) and others about the importance of achieving people's aspirations through starter homes and of making sure that we have locally led system delivering with local plans.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) outlined the important work being done by the London Land Commission, which I co-chair with the Mayor of London, to make sure that we are delivering land across London. He rightly pointed out that it is important that we continue to deliver public land, right across the country, to reach and exceed the target of 150,000 homes from public sector land that the Prime Minister has rightly set for this Parliament.

We in this Government have a strong record in protecting those in the rental sector. We have made £6.7 million available to local authorities to identify and successfully prosecute rogue landlords and lettings agencies, and 40,000 properties have been inspected. It is nice to have the Opposition's endorsement for the measures in the Bill to drive rogue landlords out of business. It is a shame, therefore, that the shadow Secretary of State's reasons for opposing the Bill betray a fundamental misunderstanding of what the people of this country are crying out for—but that, I suspect, is why we got the result we did in the general election.

Mr Betts *rose—*

Brandon Lewis: No, I will not give way at the moment.

Eighty-six per cent. of people say that if they had a free choice they would choose to buy their own home. This Government were elected because the people of this country saw the evidence that we would give them that choice. This Bill underwrites that determination. The shadow Secretary of State says that it will not help people who struggle to own their home, but he is wrong. Let me remind the House of our record so far. Since the spring of 2010, over 230,000 people have been helped to buy a home using Government-backed schemes. I am sure that he will, at some stage, want to thank us for the fact that in his constituency housing starts are up by 57% since 2010. Help-to-buy schemes have already helped nearly 120,000 people to buy their own home. The help-to-buy equity loan has now been extended until 2020, helping a further 194,000 households. Forty-one thousand new shared ownership homes have been delivered. Now, because of this Bill, our ambition of 200,000 starter homes will become a reality.

[Brandon Lewis]

This Bill will enshrine equality in the social housing sector. It will give the Government the ability to deliver on the side of aspirational, hard-working families. It will provide more people with opportunities to own their own home—that is more people with the financial security that a secure foundation of home ownership provides. I was pleased to hear many Labour Members outline their support in principle for people's right to buy, and I hope they can convince their Front Benchers to take that forward.

Emma Reynolds: Will the Minister give way?

Brandon Lewis: I am afraid not because we are so short of time.

The Bill will give this nation the fair housing market that it deserves. It builds on the 260,000 affordable homes built over the course of the past few years.

Emma Reynolds *rose—*

Hon. Members: It's her birthday!

Brandon Lewis: I give way to the hon. Lady.

Emma Reynolds: In the previous Parliament, one of the Minister's predecessors promised a one-for-one replacement of the right-to-buy homes sold, and the Government did not achieve that. Why should anyone believe that they are going to achieve it with their current policies?

Brandon Lewis: In congratulating the hon. Lady and wishing her a happy birthday, I say to her that her gift from us is the fact that, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State outlined, local authorities are already doing better than the one-for-one extra homes being built, and are almost at two-for-one in London. I use the words about building homes very cautiously and seriously, because this is at the heart of everything we do. We understand the importance of a home to people and their desire to have their own home.

We believe in having decisions made locally. The planning system should be driven by local people, for local people. That is why we want to facilitate speeding up and making easier further neighbourhood planning. It is why we have invested £22.5 million in the neighbourhood planning support programme, with more than 1,600 plans going through the process at the moment.

This Bill will change the way we think about our homes and the homes of our families. No longer will people be left behind, believing that a home to own is a dream for another generation, no matter what the shadow Secretary of State may say. No longer will a social tenant look at their neighbour exercising the right to buy and think, "Why can't I do that?" No longer will councils and house builders grapple with a planning system that is too slow and does not deliver for local communities.

This Government were elected on a strong mandate to make sure that the homes this nation deserves are built where communities want them and need them. This Bill is proof that we are a Government of opportunity, choice and prosperity—a Government empowering the "generation rent" of today to become the "generation buy" of tomorrow. I commend the Government's Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 228, Noes 305.

Division No. 104] [9.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Mr David
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flello, Robert
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Gapes, Mike
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Huq, Dr Rupa
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Leslie, Chris
Lewis, Clive
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon

Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
Mearns, Ian
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Mulholland, Greg
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sherriff, Paula
Siddiq, Tulip
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Starmer, Keir
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
West, Catherine
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Woodcock, John
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Grahame M. Morris and Sue Hayman

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, Alun
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen

Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Watkinson, Dame Angela
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
George Hollingbery and Margot James

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 306, Noes 215.

Division No. 105] [10.13 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, Alun
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert

Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Watkinson, Dame Angela
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
George Hollingbery and Margot James

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Mr David
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flello, Robert
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Gapes, Mike
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Huq, Dr Rupa
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Leslie, Chris
Lewis, Clive
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin

Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
Mearns, Ian
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Mulholland, Greg
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sherriff, Paula
Siddiq, Tulip
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Starmer, Keir
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
West, Catherine
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Woodcock, John
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Grahame M. Morris and Sue Hayman

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

HOUSING AND PLANNING BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Housing and Planning Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

2. Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 10 December 2015.

3. The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets. Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

4. Proceedings on Consideration and proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

6. Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—*(Julian Smith.)*

Question agreed to.

HOUSING AND PLANNING BILL (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Housing and Planning Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(1) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State; and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—*(Julian Smith.)*

The House divided: Ayes 300, Noes 159.

Division No. 106] [10.26 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, Alun
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie

Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Watkinson, Dame Angela
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
George Hollingbery and Margot James

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnham, rh Andy
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, Julie
Corbyn, Jeremy
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Mr David
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dugher, Michael
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Esterson, Bill
Farrelly, Paul

Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Gapes, Mike
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Haigh, Louise
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lavery, Ian
Leslie, Chris
Lewis, Clive
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
Mearns, Ian
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Mulholland, Greg
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shannon, Jim
Sherriff, Paula
Siddiq, Tulip
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Timms, rh Stephen
Turley, Anna
Twigg, Derek
Vaz, Valerie
West, Catherine
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Grahame M. Morris and Sue Hayman

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question agreed to.

HOUSING AND PLANNING BILL (WAYS AND MEANS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Housing and Planning Bill, it is expedient to authorise the charging of fees by virtue of the Act.—*(Julian Smith.)*

The House divided: Ayes 298, Noes 138.

Division No. 107] [10.38 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, Alun
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon

Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
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Lefroy, Jeremy
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
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Mackintosh, David
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Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Watkinson, Dame Angela
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
George Hollingbery and
Margot James

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnham, rh Andy
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Coaker, Vernon
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Mr David
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dugher, Michael
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Esterson, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Gapes, Mike
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Haigh, Louise
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lavery, Ian
Leslie, Chris
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, John
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
Mearns, Ian
Morden, Jessica
Mulholland, Greg
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Onn, Melanie
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey

Rotheram, Steve
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shannon, Jim
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Twigg, Derek
West, Catherine
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Grahame M. Morris and Sue Hayman

Question accordingly agreed to.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

Ordered,

That Michael Ellis be discharged from the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and Victoria Prentis be added.—*(Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.)*

Maternity Units: Bereavement Care

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Julian Smith.)*

10.50 pm

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I am delighted to have secured this debate on bereavement care in maternity units, which stems from my own experience and from further research. I should stress that I am no expert in maternity or bereavement, but I speak from personal experience. In May 2014, my wife had her 20-week pregnancy scan, at which point an abnormality was identified. Further tests led to a diagnosis of Edwards syndrome. I do not want to go into the detail of my son's condition, but Edwards syndrome is described as being "not compatible with life", so we were well aware of the likely outcome. However, our son was clearly a fighter and he survived full term, to 41 weeks, but sadly, in October last year, he was stillborn.

As hard as it is to tell my story, it sets the scene for this debate and will, I hope, give the House a small insight into the experience of the parents of the 5,000 babies who are either stillborn or die within seven days of birth every year in England. It is difficult at the best of times to talk about death, particularly the death of children or babies. We all hope it will never happen to us. But there must be provision, facilities and trained staff ready, willing and able to assist families who find themselves in this awful position.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am pleased to be here to support the hon. Gentleman this evening. I realise that he is telling us a very personal story. The figures indicate that 11 babies are stillborn in the UK every day, which makes stillbirth 15 times more common than cot death. Does he agree that we need not only bereavement centres in hospitals but also the presence of someone from the Church to give spiritual, emotional and physical help at that time?

Will Quince: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I thank him for his intervention. The chaplain at the hospital certainly gave us a huge amount of solace. They provide a really important service.

For my wife and I, our care was absolutely fantastic. I cannot praise highly enough the staff at Colchester general hospital who cared for us when we needed it most. The very positive experience that my wife and I had at Colchester represents the model I would like to see rolled out across the country. As the chance of our son being born alive was poor, we were booked into the Rosemary suite, a specialist bereavement suite at the hospital. Crucially, it was far enough away from the hustle and bustle of the maternity unit, with a room that the dad can also stay in and a lounge and kitchenette. It is as near as you can get to a home from home.

The suite gave me and my wife the chance to mentally prepare for what was to come. Importantly, it was away from the noise of crying babies and happy parents and families. It was a place to prepare but also a place to grieve in private, and somewhere that we could be with our son. Importantly, the Rosemary suite also had a cool cot, which is a piece of medical equipment that acts like a refrigerated cradle, so that babies who have died do not need to be taken straight to the mortuary.

That means that parents and family members can spend as much time as they want with their baby. Sister Liz Barnes, the gynaecology nurse counsellor, gave us a huge amount of emotional support, both before and after the event. I cannot tell you what a comfort it was to have Liz with us, speaking to us and guiding us through the next steps and, of course, the funeral arrangements.

Having gone through that experience, I had assumed that every maternity unit in this country had a bereavement suite, but sadly that is far from the truth. I have heard shocking stories of a lack of compassion and care shown to parents of stillborn babies in maternity units. An article published in *BMJ Open* in 2013 on bereaved parents' experience of stillbirth highlighted some of the problems in care for parents in some of our hospitals. The report carried interviews with bereaved parents and contained some very distressing responses. One mother said:

"They only left him with me for about an hour. Then they just took him away. I was begging them not to take my baby".

Others talked of a poor experience with hospital staff. One said:

"I thought these people"—

midwives and doctors—

"knew what they were doing. I wish I hadn't thought that now."

Another claimed:

"The delivery was just awful from start to finish. They almost treated me like 'the woman with the dead baby'. There was no sympathy. When I asked to see a doctor, this particular doctor came in and said, 'We're very busy.' And his exact words, I'll never forget them, "Well, with all due respect, your baby's dead already'. Which was just the most awful thing you could say."

Some highlighted a distressing rush to decision making. One mother said:

"I wish someone had said to me in those first few hours, 'Even if you don't want to see her now, you can see her in an hour or two. Or in a day or so'. I was left to believe that because I wasn't ready to see her, that was final."

Some of these examples are really hard to listen to, but there are also some very encouraging stories within the report. Some mothers spoke of the "very, very caring staff". Another very movingly said:

"Even though she wasn't breathing and she didn't open her eyes, she"—

the midwife—

"still said you've got a beautiful baby girl. It just meant the world."

I will remember until the day I die the midwife who helped me dress our son after he had sadly passed away, and she said, "You have a beautiful baby". I will never forget that.

The report concludes that in these tragic situations, clinicians and hospital staff

"only have one chance to get it right".

It also stated that the experience of stillbirth can be influenced as much by staff attitude and caring behaviours as by high-quality clinical procedures. Last month, a study said that the UK provides the best end-of life care in the world, but if we want to maintain this level, we should not forget end-of-life care for stillborn babies and those with very short lives. The impact of stillbirth and post-natal death on parents should not be understated.

As it stands, maternity bereavement care in English hospitals is patchy. A major survey by the bereavement charity, Sands, from 2010 highlighted that nearly half of the maternity units in England did not have a dedicated room on the labour ward for mothers whose baby has died. That is important because these rooms are where they cannot hear other babies, jubilant parents and visiting families. It is absolutely vital that more hospitals recognise the importance of bereavement suites and their role in easing the pain and loss of bereaved families. These bereavement suites should be separate from the main maternity unit.

Even though I was absolutely aware of the likely outcome when I entered the Rosemary suite in October last year, nothing can prepare you for the shock and the numbness that comes from seeing your wife give birth to a lifeless baby. The precious hours we spent in what I can describe only as beautiful silence afterwards helped me and my wife come to terms with what had just happened. No parent should have to face being taken to a room in a maternity ward of crying babies when you have just gone through a stillbirth.

Many charities, such as Sands, Cruse and The Compassionate Friends do a fantastic job in raising awareness of the support that should be provided to bereaved parents. Many of the bereavement suites in hospitals are actually partially funded and provided by the fantastic work of these charities. I know many bereaved parents, us included, raise money after their loss, knowing how valuable these suites are. I know there has been some progress made in this area. In 2013-14, the Government invested £35 million in new maternity equipment and facilities. That helped to fund nearly 20 new bereavement suites and areas to support bereaved families. There is also a growing recognition of the role of bereavement-trained midwives, and that is really important in helping bereaved families after stillbirth or infant death. In February 2014, the NHS published a report on the support available for loss in early and late pregnancy, which stated:

"There needs to be better recognition of the bereavement midwife role. Generally, these roles are not part of the original establishment. Trusts are beginning to recognise the value in having these specialised posts and they are becoming more commonplace."

It is great to see trusts increasingly recognise the fantastic work that these specialist bereavement suites and the staff can play in these tragic circumstances. I know that my family were very grateful for the fantastic support that we received.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for making a very important and powerful speech, drawing on his own tragic experiences. I have seen such experiences in my own clinical work far too often. Does he agree that whereas we normally leave commissioning to the discretion of local commissioners, we should be pushing in the next mandate to NHS England for there to be standard commissioning for all clinical commissioning groups to ensure that all birthing units have appropriate bereavement space and facilities to look after women who have had a miscarriage or had a stillbirth?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for that. I could not have put it better myself. I recognise the work that he did when he was a Minister in this area, and the huge part that he played in that £35 million investment.

I wish to see the Department of Health do three things to improve maternity bereavement care in England: first, to carry out a full assessment of the state of

[Will Quince]

maternity bereavement provision in England, including on the number of maternity bereavement suites in each of our maternity units; secondly, to work with NHS England and local clinical commissioning groups to raise awareness of maternity bereavement care; and thirdly, to consider introducing guidelines that each maternity unit should have a specific maternity bereavement suite for families.

I hope that I have been able to do this matter justice in such a short period of time. Great quality maternity bereavement care had such a positive effect on my family and me. I want the great care that we received to be extended to many other bereaved families across our country. Ernest Hemingway is attributed with saying:

"For sale: baby shoes never worn"

Those words encapsulate in a brutally concise way the sadness of losing a child.

The NHS cannot take away the loss or the grief, but we can make sure that every parent has the time, space and environment in which to grieve in peace.

11.1 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): It is a huge honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) who has spoken with such courage about the experience that he and his wife had with the birth of their son. I know that there are many parents who will have had similar experiences, and it is a testament to the support that he received during his son's birth and death, which he spoke about so movingly, that he has the strength to speak today.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for asking me to contribute to his debate. Certainly I would not be able to speak in this debate without the support that I received. The night my son died, I woke to find him not breathing. Arriving at hospital, after looking at a flat line in the ambulance for more than 20 minutes, a crash team was waiting for me, but it was too late. The consultant neonatologist was a calm and reassuring presence, and the nursing staff were patient. I readily agreed to a post mortem, as I wanted to know exactly what had happened. Staff at the hospital were wonderful, but I found myself in a plain room with questions being asked of me. I was told that I had to wait for the police. I had left in such a panic that I had left my telephone behind and I could not remember any telephone numbers, and I was there on my own. *[Interruption.]*

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way in what is a very, very powerful and emotional contribution. Does she agree that this Government are making great strides to help support parents who are at a very vulnerable point in their lives? I look forward to seeing her, during our time in this House, helping to move the debate forward.

Antoinette Sandbach: I certainly do agree with my hon. Friend, and I am very grateful to him for his intervention. That night, I was given a leaflet by the Chrysalis Trust, on which there were telephone numbers that gave me invaluable information about the help that I could access.

I arrived home later that morning to find police officers going through my house. Clearly, they had to investigate the death as it had been away from the hospital. I had to explain to my six-year-old what had happened. It was then that the advice in the leaflet came into its own, because it was made clear to me that I should not say that my son had gone to sleep. It was at that point that I realised that I would need additional help, as I did not know how to cope with what had happened. I called the number for the Chrysalis charity, and it organised counselling for me, which was a lifeline.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to John from the Alder Centre at Alder Hey hospital, as there was no counselling available in north Wales, and the counselling that was provided was funded through the Chrysalis charity with the aid of a small grant from the NHS trust. The grant was subsequently withdrawn, forcing the closure of that charity.

The two hospitals that serve my constituency, Leighton hospital and the Countess of Chester, both have specialist rooms for babies who are known to have limited life expectancy following birth, with one-to-one-care offered. The support of those staff is invaluable and Leighton, which has an award-winning maternity department, has a trained bereavement midwife. For parents who suffer loss, however, counselling services can be accessed only via a referral from their GP. The Countess of Chester has the newly equipped Lavender suite, with a cool cot that allows parents to spend time with their baby, but a parent presenting at A&E or through the child unit would not have access to that suite. There is a full-time counsellor at the trust, but the workload means that it can be several weeks before a parent can get support. Both hospitals refer to Sands, which has volunteers rather than trained counsellors.

Bliss outlines that 41% of neonatal units nationally say that parents have no access to a trained medical health worker, with 30% of neonatal units saying that parents have no access to any psychological support at all. The Alder Centre offers 24-hour bereavement support and, as the centre has said to me:

"It is important to slow down the decision making to give parents the space in which to make informed decisions, it is vital to have that talking support with someone who can say to you it is alright, take your time."

Fifteen babies die a day, and there are five deaths a week due to sudden infant death syndrome. That figure has been the same for the past 20 years.

Charities working in this field, such as Sands, Bliss, Group B Strep Support, the Lullaby Trust and Tommy's, need data so that they can target their research and consider potential common factors contributing to our high infant mortality rates. I urge the Minister to ensure that the British Association of Perinatal Medicine guidelines are followed and that psychological support is available for parents who suffer a perinatal, stillbirth or sudden infant death. I am aware that the Government have made a commitment to put mental health services on an equal footing to physical health services. This area clearly needs careful consideration and a greater degree of concentration by clinical commissioning groups and NHS trusts. I know that there is a national perinatal epidemiology unit at Oxford and would be grateful if the Minister updated us on that and on what has happened to the NHS England plan to support those with counselling needs, the report on which was due to be submitted in March 2015.

Support for parents is arguably just as important, if not more important, when the dreams and hopes of a new baby's arrival are shattered. The national standards exist, but it is vital to ensure that they are complied with so that every parent has access to the help and support they need.

11.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester (Will Quince) and for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) for coming to the House and raising this important matter in an abnormally well-attended Adjournment debate. They are very brave to have shared their personal experiences, and not only the House but the nation will benefit from that. They have raised the issue just at the right time, and I hope we will be able to incorporate the larger part of what they have said within our policy formulation pretty quickly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester said that he was no expert in this field, and I would beg to differ only with that part of his speech, as he surely is, as are his wife and my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury. My hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) brought his clinical experience to bear. It is clear from all their comments that there is much to do in this important area. I give an initial commitment that I will try to address all those things in the months ahead.

The description given by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester of the care at Colchester general hospital is important in two ways. First, he described how care, when it goes well, can completely change what is a traumatic, horrifying experience not into one that is any better but into one that is manageable. Secondly, in relation specifically to that hospital, which has had very serious problems over the past few years, he described how committed and caring the staff are, and how that has shown through in an individual way. Indeed, the experience of Sister Liz Barnes and the rest of the staff at the Rosemary suite should be copied around the country by hospitals that on the face of it, and in other parts of their operations, are performing better than Colchester general hospital. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to pass back to his hospital and to his constituents the very considerable thanks of the Department and others.

I read the *British Medical Journal* article, at my hon. Friend's suggestion. It is a harrowing read. All the stories in it are, by turns, profoundly depressing, shocking and, to someone who is a new father, viscerally arresting, and also uplifting and very beautiful. It contains some very sensible advice about the need for time, for a culture of care, and for careful consideration of parents' wishes, some distance after the death of a baby, to help us understand how better to look after those who are just entering that most awful place.

My hon. Friend's first wish was that we look carefully again at the number of bereavement suites around the country. I have already asked officials to look at that. The numbers have increased somewhat since the 2010 survey, so we are now at well over half, but that is nowhere near enough. I will now, as a consequence of his raising this issue, ensure that we get a proper assessment of the number of bereavement suites. Already, all new-build maternity units will have a bereavement suite in the right place. In fact, I intend to toughen up the guidelines so that they are not so much a suggestion, specifically about proximity to the rest of the maternity unit, but something rather more forceful than that. I hope that in finding out how great is the extent of the lack of provision in other hospitals, we can do something to address this in the months ahead.

My hon. Friend raised commissioning and the work of NHS England and local CCGs. My constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich, made a point about the mandate. I will look at this carefully in the next few months. The date for the reassessment of the mandate is coming up shortly. However, the Government are undertaking a whole series of other policy initiatives in maternity and in end-of-life care, and this is the right moment to look at many of issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester and others raised so that we can get a response that is universal but also respects a lot of the different good work that is going on around the country. In producing a national set of guidelines and policy instruments, I want to make sure that we respect the fact that in different parts of the country organic solutions to these terrible challenges have grown out of local will. Those solutions must be respected and, indeed, spread. I would not want to stamp on that by issuing guidance that was too demanding.

My hon. Friend's points about guidelines on maternity bereavement were expanded on by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury in terms of counselling. She spoke powerfully of the need to provide equality of care at a distance after the event of a stillbirth or the death of a baby, which is not very usual in the national health service. She highlighted the fact that in some parts of the country this is being done well and in others it is not. That is precisely the kind of variation that we need to eradicate in dealing with the issues which both my hon. Friends raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury correctly pointed to the study undertaken by the national perinatal epidemiology unit in 2014, "Listening to parents after stillbirth or the death of a baby after birth", and I hope to be able to draw on the conclusions of that, which broadly support the point that she made, to see how we can eradicate that variation as quickly as possible.

Both my hon. Friends spoke of the contribution of Bliss, Sands, Tommy's and other sometimes local charities which do remarkable work. In drawing up policy and guidelines, we need to respect that so that we maximise the enormous good will that there is in trying to help people through stillbirth and the death of a baby. The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise told me of a constituent of hers who had suffered a stillbirth and had started a fundraising campaign which, within weeks, had surpassed by 10 times the amount that she had expected to raise. That is the power of local bodies which, if we can energise and use it, will enable us to do so much more at a national level. In bringing all this together in the months ahead, I hope we will be able to release that energy, passion and commitment, so much of which is born out of personal tragedy, and that

[Ben Gummer]

we will be able to do far more than I would be able to achieve in Whitehall or all of us would be able to achieve in this place.

Finally, the vocation of bereavement midwives was mentioned by both my hon. Friends. We are increasing the number of midwives. The mandate has been written in such a way—in part by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich—and I hope that will lead to an increase in the number of midwives who have specialist training in bereavement. I will ensure that I get back to my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester and for Eddisbury with details of how that might be achieved.

Our efforts should go further than that. I spoke today to the chief executive of Health Education England about ensuring that there is training in all clinical areas on dealing with bereavement and providing palliative care. I hope we can do far more for all trainee clinicians, especially those dealing with maternity, so that there is a widespread understanding of the issues and it is not left to a specialist group, but is part of the general training in care that should lie right at the heart of our NHS.

The national health service does not mean anything unless we care for those for whom health is not the end point. It is the selflessness of care which should lie at the heart of our national health service because that is the foundation on which we build medical help. That is no more so than in this case where, at the point of greatest expectation of hope and joy, people experience the deepest sense of tragedy. Once again I thank my hon. Friends for making that plain to all of us in the House this evening, and I hope this might be an Adjournment debate with a difference—that it will produce a real outcome, from which they will hopefully draw some encouragement from what is otherwise an unspeakably terrible experience.

Question put and agreed to.

11.19 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 2 November 2015

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Housing Associations

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has altered, with retrospective effect, how private registered providers of social housing (commonly known as housing associations) are treated in the National accounts. ONS has concluded that housing associations should have been classified as public rather than private since 2008, due to several of the regulatory requirements imposed by the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 introduced by the previous Government. ONS will now apply this change retrospectively back to 2008.

This is purely a statistical change. Reclassification makes no material changes to the operation of housing associations, does not nationalise housing associations and the Government have no plans to impose new controls on the sector—including over spending or borrowing. Housing associations will continue to be able to access those existing Government programmes that have been open to them. The Government remain committed to delivering 275,000 new affordable homes.

Housing associations are voluntary organisations and we are committed to reflecting their historic voluntary ethos and strongly believe they should continue to be independent of Government. That belief is reflected in our decision to extend Right To Buy to housing association tenants by accepting a voluntary offer from the sector rather than implementing the policy through legislation.

As set out in our agreement with the housing association sector on Right to Buy, the Government are committed to developing deregulatory measures to help housing associations build more homes and help more people into home ownership. I set out the details of this agreement in my previous written ministerial statement (12 October 2015, *Official Report*, column 4WS - HCWS222). I now intend to bring forward a package of deregulatory measures that will deliver this commitment while also aiming to return housing associations to the private sector in the future. The regulatory system will continue to ensure the good governance and financial viability of the housing association sector, retaining the confidence of lenders.

I will work with the housing association sector, the social housing regulator and other stakeholders to finalise the deregulatory measures, with a view to delivering them through the Housing and Planning Bill.

[HCWS281]

SCOTLAND

Scotland Bill

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): The UK Government are delivering on their commitment to make the Scottish Parliament one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world. Every deadline has been met in bringing forward new powers to the Scottish Parliament, and another milestone will be reached on 9 November when the Scotland Bill has its Report and Third Reading.

The Scotland Bill delivers the Smith Commission agreement in full. The agreement was reached by Scotland's five main political parties, and it means the Scottish Parliament will have control over around £11 billion of income tax revenues and responsibility over welfare benefits worth approximately £2.7 billion (by 2014-15 figures). For the first time, more than 50 per cent of the Scottish Parliament's budget will be funded from revenues raised in Scotland.

The Joint Exchequer Committee has met four times since June 2015 to take forward negotiations on Scotland's fiscal framework. The meetings have focused on key elements of the framework—block grant adjustment and subsequent indexation mechanisms, administration and implementation costs, the no detriment principle, capital and resource borrowing, VAT assignment, fiscal scrutiny and governance. Discussions have been constructive and are focused on securing a fair and workable fiscal framework which delivers the recommendations made by the Smith Commission in its report of November 2014.

Work is continuing and both Governments aim to complete this work as soon as possible in order to give respective Parliaments time for due consideration of both the fiscal framework and the Scotland Bill. This is likely to be after both the UK spending review and the draft Scottish Budget. Since the Scotland Bill's introduction to Parliament in May 2015 it has been subject to healthy and productive scrutiny, including five days of debate in the House of Commons so far. During this time I have spoken to people from organisations representing the range of Scottish public life about the new powers the Bill contains, as have my ministerial colleagues. I have worked with the Scottish Government to seek their views, and committees of the UK and Scottish Parliaments have taken evidence and reported on the Bill's provisions.

Throughout this work I have been clear that I would reflect on sensible and constructive suggestions made. Today I am tabling amendments to the Scotland Bill. I have listened to the debate and I am responding with amendments designed to improve the effectiveness of the legislation and to ensure that the new powers for the Scottish Parliament work as the Smith Commission intended. Part 1 of the Bill relates to constitutional arrangements. An amendment will strengthen the clause on the permanence of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government by including a provision that includes a requirement that the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government should not be abolished except on the basis of a decision of the people of Scotland. While the UK Government are clear this is a scenario that has never been envisaged, the amendment is intended to make clear that there is absolutely no doubt: Holyrood is here to stay.

Additional amendments to Part 1 provide technical refinements to the elections clauses, and ensure the Scottish Parliament is responsible for relevant provisions related to the operation of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government.

Part 3 of the Bill includes provisions on welfare. The amendments will give further flexibility to the Scottish Parliament on benefits in relation to carers, and will enable the Scottish Parliament to legislate to provide for forms of non-financial assistance with a view to reducing maternity expenses, funeral expenses or expenses for heating in cold weather. There will no longer be a cap on the amount of discretionary financial assistance an individual who is in receipt of a reserved benefit can receive to assist with rental costs. The discretionary financial assistance must still be provided to help the individual with their housing costs and additional spending must be funded by the Scottish Government. The Smith agreement stated that universal credit will remain a reserved benefit to be administered and delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions, and Scottish Ministers to make decisions about varying the housing costs within universal credit for claimants who rent their homes as well as deciding when to pay those housing costs direct to landlords. A co-operative approach between the UK and Scottish Governments will be essential and amendments will clarify the Secretary of State's role in agreeing to universal credit regulations that can be laid by Scottish Ministers.

Paragraph 54 of the Smith agreement relates to the power to create new benefits in devolved areas. A new clause will be tabled to address this.

The remaining parts of the Bill transfer substantial powers to the Scottish Government and Scottish Ministers. Amendments will be tabled to clarify the approach taken to the devolution of tribunals and to the Crown Estate. In response to feedback from stakeholders the clause on equal opportunities has been amended in order to better set out the powers to be devolved. Other amendments strengthen the delivery of the Smith agreement on the clauses relating to fuel poverty, onshore oil and gas licencing, consumer advocacy and advice and the office of communications. A new clause ensures the destination of Scottish fines, forfeitures and fixed penalties can be made explicit in primary legislation where necessary.

The Smith Commission agreement outlined a number of areas for further consideration, and the UK and Scottish Governments have taken forward discussions on each of those. As a result of those discussions I am tabling amendments to devolve abortion policy and responsibility for welfare foods to the Scottish Parliament. The amendments tabled today will strengthen the Scotland Bill and represent another milestone in making the Scottish Parliament one of the most powerful devolved parliaments in the world. I look forward to this important piece of legislation returning to the House for debate next week.

[HCWS282]

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 2 November 2015

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Monday 2 November 2015

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