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Public Bill Committee

PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE BILL

Seventh Sitting

Wednesday 14 May 2025

(Morning)

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Sunday 18 May 2025

The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: Wera Hobhouse, † Dr Rupa Huq, Christine Jardine, Derek Twigg

† Amos, Gideon *(Taunton and Wellington)* (LD)
† Caliskan, Nesil *(Barking)* (Lab)
† Chowns, Ellie *(North Herefordshire)* (Green)
† Cocking, Lewis *(Broxbourne)* (Con)
† Dickson, Jim *(Dartford)* (Lab)
† Ferguson, Mark *(Gateshead Central and Whickham)* (Lab)
† Glover, Olly *(Didcot and Wantage)* (LD)
† Grady, John *(Glasgow East)* (Lab)
† Holmes, Paul *(Hamble Valley)* (Con)
† Kitchen, Gen *(Wellingborough and Rushden)* (Lab)
† Martin, Amanda *(Portsmouth North)* (Lab)
† Murphy, Luke *(Basingstoke)* (Lab)
† Pennycook, Matthew *(Minister for Housing and Planning)*
† Pitcher, Lee *(Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme)* (Lab)
Shanks, Michael *(Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero)*
† Simmonds, David *(Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner)* (Con)
† Taylor, Rachel *(North Warwickshire and Bedworth)* (Lab)

Simon Armitage, *Committee Clerk*

† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 14 May 2025

(Morning)

[Dr Rupa Huq *in the Chair*]

Planning and Infrastructure Bill

Clause 47

Spatial development strategies

9.25 am

The Chair: I remind Members to send their speaking notes by email to our *Hansard* colleagues at hansardnotes@parliament.uk. I also ask Members to switch electronic devices to silent. Tea and coffee are not allowed during sittings. Officially, I think that Members have to ask my permission to remove their jackets, so I can give a unilateral order, on a hot day like this, that you may all have it off—*[Laughter.]* You may all remove your jackets; it is hot, especially for women of a certain age. We now come to clause 47.

Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): I beg to move amendment 21, in clause 47, page 62, leave out from line 32 to line 2 on page 63.

This relates to amendment 22. This amendment would remove the requirement for unitary authorities to prepare spatial development strategies.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment 22, in clause 47, page 63, leave out lines 14 to 17.

This relates to amendment 21. This amendment would remove the requirement for unitary authorities to prepare spatial development strategies.

Gideon Amos: It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Dr Huq—although I was not sure how much of a pleasure until you introduced the sitting in the way that you did.

Amendments 21 and 22 would remove the requirement on unitary authorities to prepare spatial development strategies, simply based on the resources that unitary authorities have and the stretch under which they have been placed.

My own authority is working hard to stave off financial challenges after being left with a massive deficit to manage—£2 of every £3 of the council's funding is spent on care for children and adults, but it also has to prepare a new local plan. It has permission for 11,000 homes that are not yet built, but the new plan will require a 41% increase in housing allocations in Somerset, which is a massive task that will cost millions of pounds. For an individual unitary authority, having to not only establish a unitary local plan but, at the same time, prepare a spatial development strategy seems over the top. That should be reserved for mayoral authorities, where a strategic authority is established.

We do not oppose the concept of spatial development strategies; for strategic-level authorities, they could be a sensible addition to the planning system to reintroduce the strategic level of planning that was taken away. However, we are concerned about the significant additional burden on unitary authorities in also being required to prepare spatial development strategies that are meant to be more strategic in nature and have more than a single unitary authority area. With that in mind, I commend amendments 21 and 22 to the Committee.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): It is a pleasure to resume our proceedings with you in the Chair, Dr Huq. I thank the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington for tabling amendment 21, but the Government will have to resist it for reasons that I will set out. Having said that, as we have already discussed in previous sessions, we absolutely recognise the real challenges that local planning authorities face not only in resourcing but more widely in capability and capacity. We have discussed a number of the measures that the Government are taking, both in the Bill and outside it, to address that challenge.

Amendments 21 and 22 seek to make upper-tier county councils and unitary authorities ineligible to produce a spatial development plan. It is the Government's intention that, in the future, all spatial development strategies will be produced by strategic authorities in accordance with our devolution framework, including combined authorities, combined county authorities and the Greater London Authority. While we are making substantial progress, with six areas currently part of the devolution priority programme, the establishment of strategic authorities across the whole of England will be a gradual process.

However, the Government want to move quickly on strategic planning. That means that, as well as combined authorities and combined county authorities, upper-tier county councils and unitary authorities are being made into strategic planning authorities with a requirement to produce a spatial development strategy. The amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington would remove the requirement for those aforementioned authorities.

The requirement to produce a spatial development strategy will be realised either individually or in defined groupings; in some cases, upper-tier county councils and unitary authorities may also be grouped with a combined authority or combined county authority. As such, I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his amendment.

Gideon Amos: Dr Huq, I do not know whether I get the opportunity to sum up, so I have jumped in with an intervention. Could the Minister clarify the circumstances in which an individual unitary authority—perhaps a unitary county such as Somerset, or Oxfordshire, if it becomes a unitary county—would be required to, on its own, prepare a spatial development strategy? Will all unitary authorities be required to prepare spatial development strategies on top of, and in parallel with, preparing local plans? I think that that clarification would be helpful.

The Chair: Apparently, there will be a chance to sum up and to respond to the summing up.

Matthew Pennycook: Thank you for that clarification, Dr Huq; we may hear further from the hon. Gentleman on that point. Just to be clear, the Government are driving for universal coverage for strategic planning across the whole of England, so, either individually or

in defined groupings, upper-tier county councils and unitary authorities will have to, in some form, be part of producing a spatial development strategy.

As I said, I very much recognise the challenge that the hon. Gentleman posed around resourcing. It is worth pointing out that, in addition to the elements that we discussed yesterday—the £46 million that the Budget allocated to local planning authority capacity and capability, and the measures in the Bill allowing for the setting of fees locally and the ringfencing of those fees—the Government have already identified funding for 2025-26 to support authorities to prepare for the production of spatial development strategies. We recognise the need for core funding and that is being negotiated with the Treasury as part of the spending review for 2026 to 2029.

Lewis Cocking (Broxbourne) (Con): Could the Minister outline what would happen if a unitary council created a spatial development strategy and then became part of a larger, bigger authority under the devolution? What would happen to their specific strategy, and would that new authority, as a bigger authority, have to create a new SDS across the whole area?

Matthew Pennycook: Over time, spatial development strategies will have to reflect the appropriate geographies at the point they are renewed and refreshed—if that answers the hon. Gentleman's point. But as I said, either individually or in groupings through the strategic boards we are creating, we will have to have those SDSs in places, although obviously the geographies will be able to change over time, if that is the wish of the component member authorities.

As I was saying, for the reasons I have outlined the Government believe that the legislation, as drafted, is essential to support the introduction of our strategic planning policy, which is an important means of ensuring our pro-growth agenda and that we are able to deliver 1.5 million homes over this Parliament. As we have argued on many occasions, the introduction of a robust, universal system of strategic planning is a core part of the Government's reform agenda, and we think that the Bill is required to operate in the way that I have set out. On that basis, I ask the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington to withdraw his amendment.

Gideon Amos: I am grateful to the Minister for that clarification, and he has my respect for bringing strategic planning back into the system. I know he has worked on that for a number of years; some of us have also worked on regional planning for a number of years and can remember the regional spatial strategy processes—in fact, took part in them. However, the question of individual unitary authorities preparing SDSs remains quite a challenge.

Perhaps the Minister, in summing up, could say something about the timescale. I can see that the Government are moving towards universal coverage of mayoral—well, strategic—authorities, as well as SDSs, which makes sense, but the timescale will be crucial here. If an individual authority becomes something of an orphan, or it needs time to ally itself with others and agree its strategic authority area—for example, Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire put forward their proposal but were knocked back, so they cannot establish that strategic authority—it would seem unfair for those authorities to be required to prepare three SDSs for those three counties on top of three local plans. That is a massive amount of work. We must not underestimate the weight of work that goes into a local plan. For a huge area such as Somerset, it will costs tens of millions of pounds and it will take several years. For those three authorities also to be required to prepare an SDS at the same time would be unfortunate.

If the timing could work such that—this may be the Government's intention—those authorities have sufficient time to establish their mayoral strategic authorities first, and then develop an SDS, that would appear to be a much better way. I am interested in the Minister's comments on that. We do not intend to press the amendment to a vote.

The Chair: Minister, I am advised that you are not obliged to speak now—you can respond in writing—but if you wish to, you can.

Matthew Pennycook: I will address a couple of points to give the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington some reassurance. First, I very much welcome his support for the reintroduction of sub-regional strategic planning—I would actually say introduction, because we are not proposing a regional model along the lines of what happened before.

In our view, there has been a clear lack of strategic planning and of those effective cross-boundary mechanisms between local authorities for delivering housing growth in the past 14 years. Therefore, we do not intend to wait for strategic planning to be reintroduced. It is the Government's intention for all future SDSs to be produced by strategic authorities, but I recognise that there is a sequencing issue here.

As I have said, however, establishing strategic authorities nationwide will be a gradual process, and the Government want all areas of England to feel the benefit of effective strategic planning as soon as possible. Strategic planning boards will allow areas outside of strategic authorities to do that, so we think there is a mechanism that will allow for those instances where a strategic authority is not yet in place. As I said, however, I do recognise the sequencing issue.

To reiterate to the hon. Gentleman, we have already identified funding for 2025-26 to support authorities to prepare for the production of spatial development strategies. We expect all local planning authorities within the area of a strategic planning authority, such as district councils within a combined authority, to be closely involved in the production of a spatial development strategy, including by sharing staff members and expertise. That is already standard practice in areas producing a joint local plan, which can be done at the discretion of local authorities wishing to take part, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. On that basis, I hope that I have reassured him and other hon. Members as to the Government's intentions in this area.

Gideon Amos: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): I beg to move amendment 76, in clause 47, page 63, leave out from line 28 to the end of line 28 on page 65.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment 122, in clause 47, page 64, line 40, at end insert—

"(e) requiring the production of infrastructure delivery plans;

(f) funding for meeting the requirements of this subsection."

This amendment would extend the list of matters which the Secretary of State could include in regulations about strategic planning boards.

Paul Holmes: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Huq. I cannot tell you how delighted I am to be here for the second day in a row, with a third day tomorrow.

This simple amendment would block the mandatory transfer of powers over planning to strategic planning authorities in proposed new sections 12B and 12C of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. On the consultation for the spatial development strategy, we also think the consultation requirement in proposed new section 12H(3) should be replaced with a simple requirement to consult the public.

Blocking the mandatory transfer of powers over planning to strategic planning authorities would allow for greater local control and flexibility in decision making. It would ensure that planning decisions remained more closely aligned with the specific needs and priorities of individual communities, rather than being imposed by a centralised authority. Local authorities often have a better understanding of their residents' needs, the environmental considerations and the unique challenges, making them more capable of tailoring development plans to suit their areas.

Retaining those powers at the local level would also promote accountability, as local officials and politicians are directly answerable to the communities they serve, and foster a more transparent and responsible planning process. That approach would encourage more balanced development that reflects local aspirations, while reducing the risk of a one-size-fits-all solution imposed from above.

We take into account the comments of the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington about the burden on local authorities. I think the Minister has responded to that issue, but I would like to press him further on the Government's drive to unitarisation. He is outlining that, as we go through, this would be a gradual process, but I hope he would acknowledge that there is a risk that the repeated reforming of local government could mean added bureaucracy and a repeated requirement, as my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne said, to amalgamate plans and go through another review period. I hope the Minister can reassure us that there would be no burden on local authorities in relation to amendment 21, which slightly ties into the concerns and aspirations behind why amendment 76 was tabled, but I do not intend to debate this amendment for very long.

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): I bob to speak to amendment 122. Is now the right time?

The Chair: Go for it!

Olly Glover: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Huq, and thank you for your ongoing generosity to those of us who continue to learn how Bill Committees work.

Lib Dem amendment 122 would require the production of infrastructure delivery plans by local authorities and accompanying funding to meet the requirements of those. I note the comments of other hon. Members about taking into account the administrative burden on local authorities; we need to strike the optimum balance here, but I shall explain why I think infrastructure development plans are of merit and need to be mandated.

For those not familiar with IDPs—to use yet another dreaded acronym—I should say that they are developed during the local plan-making stage and serve as an important part of the evidence base and quality of those local plans. They identify and schedule the infrastructure needs for a community, including social, physical and green infrastructure, all of which are needed in addition to houses for the high quality, well-functioning communities we all wish to see.

The planning policy team at the local authority writes to all infrastructure providers to ask them to identify what infrastructure will be needed to accompany the development that the local plan is proposing. That becomes a list, which is tested through a viability assessment and local plan examination. Once the plan is adopted, and at the point where planning applications are submitted, planning officers will use the IDP to help to secure infrastructure—through direct delivery, financial contributions or indeed a mix of the two. IDPs are therefore an important part of both securing infrastructure and tracking the progress of its delivery.

However, at present IDPs are not compulsory and are not specified in the national planning policy framework or the Government's planning practice guidance. Local plans are supposed to be reviewed every five years, although many are not, and by extension IDPs may be updated only infrequently. We think Government should compel local authorities to produce infrastructure delivery plans so that communities get the necessary infrastructure to create the well-function communities that we need to transform our country.

Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Huq. As we have seen, there are very many amendments to this part of the Bill, which speaks to the fact that it is one of the most important parts of the legislation the Government are moving through. It is absolutely necessary that it should happen, but I want to make a quick point about infrastructure that is pertinent to this amendment.

As the Minister knows, and the Committee may know, I represent Ebbsfleet Garden City in Dartford: a new community that has arisen from no homes in about 2015 to around 5,000 now, and is due to be 15,000 by the middle of the next decade. We have seen with Ebbsfleet Garden City the importance of social and physical infrastructure being built alongside homes. Generally, the corporation there has done a good job in making sure that there are schools, recreation areas, community spaces and medical facilities; the timing has not always been brilliant, and sometimes the growth of the homes has outstripped the provision of infrastructure, but that infrastructure does eventually get delivered.

It is extremely important that the Minister gives an assurance, in line with what the amendment, I know, is seeking to do. I do not know whether the precise format that the amendment suggests is the right way to do it, but it is vital that we see that social and physical infrastructure grow at the same time as the housing.

Lewis Cocking: Does the hon. Member agree that nothing in this Bill makes developers build the social infrastructure that he is describing, which many communities desperately need, first—or at all?

Jim Dickson: The hon. Member is helping me to make my point. The only difference I have with him is that I know that the Government intend to ensure that infrastructure appears at the same time as homes and the Minister will provide reassurance on that. It is vital that that happens, via either a development corporation with those powers, or the spatial development strategies that we are discussing. Let us ensure that we do build the physical and social infrastructure at the same time as homes, with the examples of generally good development we see in Ebbsfleet Garden City reproduced elsewhere, as the Government meet their ambitious plans to build 1.5 million homes during this Parliament.

9.45 pm

Matthew Pennycook: Let me begin with amendment 76, tabled by the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner, which seeks to remove provision for the establishment of strategic planning boards that would allow two or more authorities to produce a spatial development strategy jointly. The main purpose of strategic planning is to provide a mechanism for cross-boundary planning between local planning authorities and to plan for growth on a scale that is larger than local. For that to be done as effectively as possible, it is essential that spatial development strategies are produced across the most appropriate geographies. To that end, it will be necessary for some strategic planning authorities to be grouped together so that they can produce a spatial development strategy across their combined area. Unless SDSs are produced across appropriate geographies, they will not be as effective as they could be and the full benefits of strategic planning will not be realised.

To address the perfectly reasonable point made by the hon. Member for Hamble Valley, establishing strategic authorities nationwide will be a gradual process, as I said, and the Government want all areas of England to benefit from effective strategic planning as soon as possible. Therefore, in some cases, responsibility for producing an SDS will transfer between different authorities while the broader reforms are being undertaken. We are seeking powers in the Bill to complement existing powers to make regulations for transitional arrangements when such scenarios occur, similar to how responsibility for a local plan can transfer when a local authority becomes a unitary authority. On that basis, I hope that he will withdraw the amendment.

I turn to amendment 122, which seeks to add provision for infrastructure delivery plans and funding to the list of matters in proposed new section 12C(3) to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that the Secretary of State may consider, including in regulations establishing a strategic planning board. I should make it clear to the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage that that list is not exhaustive. Indeed, proposed new section 12C(2) is clear:

> "Strategic planning board regulations may make provision about…such…matters as the Secretary of State considers are necessary or expedient to facilitate the exercise by a strategic planning board of its functions".

In general terms, the Government are clear that new development must come with the appropriate social and physical infrastructure and amenities for new communities to thrive. The hon. Member for Broxbourne challenged my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford, saying that there are not provisions in the Bill directly relating to things like infrastructure delivery plans. That is right, but the Bill is not the sum total of the action the Government are taking in housing and planning. As my hon. Friend alluded to, we are talking action in other areas. However, to address the point made by the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage directly, it is not the Government's intention for strategic planning boards or any other strategic planning authority to be required to produce an infrastructure delivery plan, although I am more than happy to pick up the wider discussion about infrastructure with him outside the Committee.

Nesil Caliskan (Barking) (Lab): I thank the Minister for reiterating the Government's position and commitment to infrastructure delivery alongside housing. Will he comment specifically on infrastructure that allows people to get on a train and go to work? Does he agree that transport infrastructure is critical and that we must not build homes in the middle of nowhere, which condemn people to poverty? The ability of people to connect to places by getting on a train or a bus to go to work and earn a decent wage, and then to get back home, is crucial for an economy that works for everyone.

Matthew Pennycook: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. As we know, done properly, transport infrastructure and effective interventions in that regard can unlock huge numbers of homes. As I said, the Government have already taken action to support the provision of infrastructure, for example in the changes to the national planning policy framework in December last year, and we are looking at what more can be done, but it is not necessary for the clause to introduce that.

I will make a final point about how IDPs work now. IDPs are put in place where local authorities decide to take them forward, on the basis that they support the delivery of a local development plan. Local development plans have to be in general conformity with spatial development strategies. There is a clear link here, even though we are not asking strategic planning boards to have responsibility for bringing forward IDPs in the way that the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage suggests. I hope that I have given him some reassurance and, on that basis, that he will agree that amendment 122 is not necessary. I also request that the hon. Member for Hamble Valley withdraws his amendment 76.

Paul Holmes: I appreciate the spirit in which, as usual, the Minister comes back. I am content to withdraw the amendment at this stage, but I would appreciate some further conversations and some reassurance on how, in the reform of local government, we do not add an undue burden on local authorities.

The hon. Member for Barking made an astute point, as usual, approaching this topic with her experience: we must absolutely make sure that where development happens, whether in rural areas or areas in the middle of nowhere—although I presume that that would be rural too—the infrastructure also comes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne said, nowhere is that stated in the legislation.

[Paul Holmes]

The Minister is a man of integrity and I take what he says as such. I know that his aims and ambitions are to make sure that there are further plans with an infrastructure-first approach, but given the Bill at the moment, as well as the reforms and changes to the NPPF, the aspirations of the hon. Member for Barking will simply not be met under this legislative agenda. Indeed, some of the housing targets and reforms brought in by this Government have placed an overwhelming burden on rural areas, rather than on urban areas where the infrastructure is already in place and easier to develop.

We look forward to challenging and scrutinising the Minister in future stages of the Bill. We also await with anticipation proposed future legislation that he will bring forward on infrastructure—

Matthew Pennycook: Not legislation, necessarily.

Paul Holmes: Not legislation, sorry. Forgive me. We are good mates—well, I think we are—so I must resist the temptation to talk across the aisle. On that basis, we look forward to what the Minister will say. We will scrutinise the measures on infrastructure that he may bring forward, and we will not press the amendment to a vote.

Olly Glover: Briefly, I am grateful to the Minister for his comments and for his empathy with and understanding of the point that we sought to make about infrastructure supporting housing. I am very grateful for his offer to discuss the wider problem at a future stage. On that basis, I am content not to move amendment 122.

Paul Holmes: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Paul Holmes: I beg to move amendment 72, in clause 47, page 65, line 34, at end insert—

"(1A) A spatial development strategy must prioritise for new development previously-developed land."

This amendment would require that spatial development strategies prioritise development on brownfield land over other locations.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 75, in clause 47, page 66, line 18, at end insert—

"(6A) A strategic planning board has a duty to ensure that any development specified or described under subsections (4) or (5) does not take place on green belt land unless there is no practicable option for development in existing urban areas, including by—

(a) increasing the density of existing development, and

(b) regenerating an existing development,

in an urban area."

This amendment would ensure that a strategic planning board must only propose development on green belt land where development in urban areas is not possible.

Amendment 82, in clause 47, page 66, line 18, at end insert—

"(6A) Where a spatial development strategy proposes the development or use of agricultural land, the strategy must consider—

(a) the grade of such agricultural land;

(b) the cumulative impact of projects developing or using such agricultural land."

New clause 104—*Protection of Green Belt land*—

"For the purposes of protecting Green Belt land, local planning authorities must—

(a) within two years of the passing of this Act, conduct a review of existing areas of Green Belt land and;

(b) for areas designated as Green Belt land under the review, prevent any development for a minimum period of 20 years."

Paul Holmes: The amendments stand in the name my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner or, in the case of amendment 82, my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland—I cannot remember his constituency name, but he is listed on the amendment paper. Like the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage, I am learning on the job—

The Chair: Aren't we all?

Paul Holmes: I appreciate your forbearance, Dr Huq.

The amendment and the others tabled by Conservative Members relate to a brownfield-first approach. Our concern with the measures in the legislation as drafted, and with the actions of the Government so far, is that the green belt at the moment is under threat. Specifically, with amendment 72, we want to ensure that land that has previously been developed should be considered for development ahead of other categories of land. That will reduce pressure to build on undeveloped greenfield land, helping to protect natural habitats, agricultural land and green belt.

In addition, we believe that such developments can regenerate neglected or derelict urban areas, improving the local environment, attracting investment and jobs, and helping residents. That is not to mention that putting brownfield sites first may benefit from existing infrastructure such as roads, public transport and water power, reducing the need for costly new developments, and making services more efficient. Essentially, we are saying to the Minister that we want spatial development to have a brownfield-first and an existing development-first approach, and a basic assumption within those guidelines.

With amendment 75, we want essentially to allow development on green-belt land only where urban development is not possible. Already we have seen in the last couple of weeks the Mayor of London, for example—despite assurances from this Government that the green belt would be safe—proposing to put something forward around the M25 on green-belt land. I know the Minister cannot comment on live planning or on the decision made by the Secretary of State this week, but there are other examples where we are seeing an encroachment on to the green belt. The Government have given assurances that the green belt would not be under threat, but we can see that some measures in the spatial development strategies and the existing powers being given to Ministers and the Secretary of State do not provide overwhelming safeguards to the green belt across the UK.

The amendment is a perfectly practicable step to make sure that ,where we have previously developed land and brownfield sites, there is a basic assumption that that is where buildings should go first, for all the reasons I set out. We also think that restricting development on green-belt land, and allowing it only where urban development is not possible, helps to protect the countryside

from urban sprawl and ensures that the natural landscape, farmland and biodiversity are preserved for future generations.

We also argue that it encourages a more efficient use of previously developed brownfield sites, as I said, within towns and cities, supporting urban regeneration and reducing the environmental impact of new construction. I think that slightly matches the aspirations of the hon. Member for Barking: by focusing growth within existing urban areas, this approach also makes better use of existing infrastructure and public services, helps to maintain clear boundaries between towns and rural areas, and supports sustainable patterns of development that are less car dependent and more community focused.

Amendment 82 would require that a spatial development strategy consider the grade of agricultural land and the cumulative impact of projects on agricultural land. Notwithstanding what I said about the protection of the green belt, previous actions, particularly by the Minister's ministerial colleagues from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, show an eradication of, and an easier approach to developing on, agricultural land. The position we have long held on that, which I know the Minister may not agree with, is that in this world of uncertainty, agricultural land should be protected. Food security is of absolute importance when we have seen food prices go up in the country because of international uncertainty.

By requiring a spatial development strategy to consider both the grade of agricultural land and the cumulative impact of projects such as the ones I described, the amendment would help to safeguard the UK's long-term food security. High-grade agricultural land is a finite and valuable resource—I think everyone on the Committee would agree with that—and it is essential for domestic food production. Factoring in its quality ensures that development prioritises lower-value land where possible, reducing the loss of productive farm land. Additionally, considering the cumulative impact of multiple developments helps to prevent gradual, piecemeal erosion of agricultural capacity, which might otherwise go unnoticed in individual planning decisions. This approach promotes a more balanced and informed strategy that protects rural economies, biodiversity and the resilience of the agricultural sector.

I hope the Minister takes the amendments in the spirit in which they are intended, which is to protect. They are not political amendments, but genuine attempts to probe the Minister to see whether he could bring in some additional protections—despite previous actions on the green belt—and look to strengthen the legislation to protect agricultural land, which I know he will agree is so important at this time for our domestic food production. The Government have been positive, and I welcome the food strategy announced by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We support that, and we absolutely agree with the aspiration.

We need a food strategy in this country—before the Minister stands up and says that the last Government did not do enough on that, let me say that I think that is a fair challenge. That is why we welcomed the Secretary of State's announcement at the beginning of this Government, but that has to be matched by the legislative actions being taken in other areas of Government, which is why we have tabled these amendments.

10 am

Gideon Amos: I rise to speak to new clause 104, which relates to green belt protection. We recognise that the Government's proposals are set out in the national planning policy framework. We do not support the way in which the standard method is being imposed on local authorities, nor do we support the way in which green belt release will be forced on local authorities through the requirement that they review and effectively release land for green belt. However, among the rules that the Government have put forward, we sympathise with the strictures they have come up with for the release of green-belt land where local authorities decide to do that, which should support higher levels of social housing.

Our new clause would require a quid pro quo for the release of green-belt land, which clearly will happen—it must happen, because it has been required and dictated in an NPPF. Local areas want to see proper protection for their green-belt land. Indeed, many areas would like to have a green belt, but it is extremely difficult for areas that have not historically had green belt to introduce it, such that there are hardly any areas where that has ever happened.

There is therefore an inequity in terms of protecting land. Greenfield land can be just as valuable and important in Taunton, where we have green wedges stretching into the centre of town, as it is in and around London, where there is official green belt protection. Our new clause would provide for local authorities to carry out a review of the green belt and then to protect that land from development for 20 years. That semi-permanent protection would be a quid pro quo for the loss of green-belt land that many authorities will see under the NPPF.

It gives people a real sense of the planning system's failures when they have believed for years and years that a piece of land near them is protected green belt, but then they attend the planning committee or some meeting, and a planner—possibly like myself in the past—comes up and says, "Oh, no, no. It's not actually protected any more. It's not got long-term protection; that protection didn't mean anything," and it is wafted away. Communities want to know how their most precious areas of green land will be protected. Our amendment seeks to provide them with a mechanism to establish green belt protection for at least 20 years.

Nesil Caliskan: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Huq. I would like to make a couple of points about the green belt, not least because I would like to address the direct comments from the shadow Minister.

Paul Holmes: Oh no!

Nesil Caliskan: I do not expect him to have followed my very short career to date or my position on the green belt, but just for the record, my long-standing position has been to identify appropriate areas on the green belt, particularly in London, where we have a housing crisis, that can be built on. The truth is that there are many areas of the green belt—areas that could, indeed, be described as grey belt—that already have some kind of development, perhaps without planning permission, or where enforcement is needed, that are entirely appropriate for housing development, and many of those areas are already well connected.

[Nesil Caliskan]

In my constituency, a new train station has been built in the Barking Riverside area in recent years. It is not green belt, but it is strategic industrial land. In our discussions about well-connected neighbourhoods, we often forget the pressure on strategic industrial land, too. That is a good example of where infrastructure was delivered and houses have followed. The rest of the country can follow that example.

On the point about urban areas needing to be the priority for development, of course, we have to see urban development intensify in housing delivery, but many of our urban areas already have high density, and overcrowding is a familiar picture. It is simply not possible to deliver the housing numbers we need by looking only at urban areas. I often hear the argument that it should be brownfield sites first. Of course, they should be first, but if people think there is a secret drawer full of brownfield sites that will deliver the housing numbers we need in this country, they are out of touch with the housing pressures facing our communities.

Paul Holmes: The hon. Lady is right that I have not followed the minutiae of her career, but I know from her comments in the Chamber and this Committee that she has an expertise that we should all listen to, even if we disagree. She led a council for a good while, so I know that she is an expert in these areas.

She outlined in her comments that urban areas should have a higher rate of delivery because they are of higher densities. Why is it, then, that on the Floor of the House, that is not matched by what she is voting for? Housing targets under the new algorithm in her area and her constituency are being reduced, while in rural areas, where she is concerned about the lack of infrastructure, they are being increased exponentially. How does she defend that, with what she has just said?

Nesil Caliskan: The hon. Member gives me the opportunity to make two points. First, the Planning and Infrastructure Bill will allow the Government to spearhead infrastructure delivery in this country in rural areas that do not have the necessary infrastructure. That is why the Bill is so important. With the necessary infrastructure, we will be able to see the delivery of homes not just in urban areas. Secondly, to the point about housing delivery in Barking and Dagenham, the area has some of the most impressive stats for house building in London and the rest of the country. It has been delivering housing at a much better rate than areas not just in London, but in the rest of the country.

My final point is about the threat to the green belt, which the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington mentioned. The biggest threat to the green belt is not having a strategic approach to planning in this country. If we take the absence of local plans in areas, as it stands, the legal framework means that if a planner says no to a planning application, and there is no up-to-date local plan, then on appeal, the appeal process can enforce such that the development happens in the green belt anyway. We need a strategic approach across the country that not only encourages or, in fact, forces local authorities to have up-to-date local plans, but ensures that house building—alongside infrastructure, which I firmly believe the Bill will help to deliver—is fair in its approach to delivering homes.

We cannot just build in urban areas. We do not have that capacity. It is unfair for those who are already living in overcrowded accommodation. People deserve to have access to open and green spaces, and our rural communities deserve to have the infrastructure necessary for well-connected neighbourhoods. I firmly believe that the Bill supports that, and that the debate around green belt and access is more nuanced than some Opposition Members have set out.

Lewis Cocking: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Huq. I rise in support of amendments 72, 75 and 82. I await with anticipation what the Minister will say, because surely we can all agree that green belt should be protected and that we should do brownfield first. Sometimes, under the current planning system, green-belt land gets developed on through the back door.

Even if a council has an up-to-date local plan, there can be issues if it does not meet its five-year land supply or housing targets in terms of its build-out rates, which the council has very little control over. The council has control over the speed and determination of planning applications. However, it can approve all the applications it wants—it could approve thousands—but if the developer or developers are not building them, the council then gets punished. Someone else will come along and say, "I want to develop on this piece of green-belt land," and when that goes to appeal, the Planning Inspectorate will say to the council, "You haven't got a five-year land supply, and you're not meeting your build-out rate targets." It is the community and the council that get punished for developers not building what they have been given approval to build.

Paul Holmes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In relation to previous comments that have been made about building on green belt through the back door, does he agree that these amendments strengthen the case for some of those councils? The current planning appeals system takes into regard national guidelines and national legislation, and these amendments provide a safeguard to stop some of those things happening.

Lewis Cocking: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point, and I completely agree. We should do anything we can to strengthen councils' hands in protecting green belt. I suspect there is broad support for brownfield-first and protecting the green belt.

I turn to amendment 82, tabled by the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie). A wider failure of the planning system is that it does not account for the cumulative impact of lots of planning decisions. This amendment goes some way to protecting farmland. It may be appropriate for a field to be developed for a specific farming purpose, but if there is lots of development in farming areas in a specific location and the planning committee does not take into account the cumulative impact, there can be negative consequences—for example, where a floodplain is built on and that creates issues for the field next door.

The Government need to grapple with this wider issue of the cumulative impact of lots of development. At the moment, planning committees judge the planning application in front of them and do not necessarily look at the cumulative impact. I hope the Government will

support our amendments, in particular amendment 82, which tries to rectify some of those cumulative impacts in order to protect our agricultural land, which is very important for our food security.

Matthew Pennycook: I thank members of the Committee for these amendments. I hope I can give them some reassurance that none of them is necessary from the Government's point of view.

I turn first to amendments 72, 75 and 82, tabled by the hon. Members for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner and for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine. These amendments relate to developments taking place on green-belt, brownfield and agricultural land resulting from the introduction of spatial development strategies. While I understand the positive intent behind the amendments in seeking to ensure that safeguards are in place to protect valuable land from development, they are not necessary, as current national policy already achieves the intended aims.

On amendment 72, I fully agree that we must make the best use possible of brownfield land for development. The Government have been very clear that we have a brownfield-first approach to development. That is recognised in national planning policy. We made changes in the recent national planning policy framework update to expand the definition of "previously developed land" and reinforce the expectation that development proposals on such land within settlements should normally be approved.

We are also consulting on our working paper on a brownfield passport, which we are considering through the introduction of national development management policies, as provided for by the previous Government's Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023. The aim of those proposals we are seeking feedback on—lots of feedback has been gratefully received—is to ensure that we prioritise and accelerate the development of previously developed land wherever possible. We are very firm on our brownfield-first approach.

Paul Holmes: I accept what the Minister says; there is a recognition across Government, demonstrated by some of the actions they have taken, that they have a brownfield-first approach. I simply ask him: what has he got to fear from an amendment that would back that up and ensure that that goes out into the community, strengthening his Government's position?

10.15 am

Matthew Pennycook: I thank the shadow Minister for that challenge. On this whole group of amendments, whether they have been tabled on the basis of a misunderstanding of spatial development strategies or Members have just taken the opportunity—I completely appreciate why—to initiate wider debates on the Government's national planning policy, I will address why I do not think they are necessary.

The Government are in absolute agreement on the point made about brownfield first. In a sense, we want the default answer for planning permissions on brownfield to be yes, unless circumstances necessitate otherwise. The hon. Member for Broxbourne made a very good point about build-out, which I addressed yesterday. The Government are looking to take action on build-out, not least with the introduction of the provisions in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, to incentivise the prompt build-out of housing sites, and we are looking to bring those forward in fairly short order.

Lewis Cocking: The Minister has just said that he wants a default yes on brownfield sites. Is he concerned that if we give carte blanche to developers and say, "You can build whatever you want on brownfield sites," some of that development on brownfield sites will not be of the quality that I am sure we both want?

Matthew Pennycook: I am not concerned, for the reasons set out in the "Brownfield Passport" working paper, which I encourage the hon. Gentleman to go away and read, if he has not had the chance to do so already. In a sense, we are looking at a set of proposals, and again I emphasise that we have asked for feedback on them and we are considering how that feedback maps on to how we take forward this approach through national development management policies. In effect, we are saying that there is a presumption that the answer to applications on brownfield land is yes, but it has to meet certain criteria and conditions. The various options that we have explored are set out in that note, but it would absolutely not be a free-for-all on brownfield land, so I hope that reassures the hon. Gentleman on that point.

I do not agree that amendment 72 is necessary to achieve the important objective that it raises because, while spatial development strategies will provide for a high-level framework for infrastructure investment for housing growth, they will not allocate specific sites. Strategic planning authorities will be required to have regard to the need to ensure that their spatial development strategy is consistent with national policy. National planning policy, as I have said, already provides strong support for brownfield development, and it is clear that brownfield land should be the first port of call.

It is also clear that authorities should give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs. In the event that spatial development strategies do not meet the requirements of the NPPF, the Bill gives the Secretary of State a range of intervention powers to ensure consistency with national policies, and those national policies are clear, as I have argued. I therefore ask that the shadow Minister withdraw the amendment.

Amendment 75 seeks to ensure that spatial development strategies consider other practical options before identifying infrastructure or the distribution of housing within the green belt. To be clear, spatial development strategies cannot allocate land for development. This is a really important point: they can identify broad locations for new development, if the participating members wish to take those forward, and that may include land within the green belt. However, the formal allocation of sites will remain the preserve of local plans and neighbourhood plans.

I am in full agreement that it is crucial to take a brownfield-first approach to development, as I have said, in which the reuse of previously developed land and options to increase density are given priority. I can assure Opposition Members that, when any such green belt review takes place, existing planning policy in relation to the reuse of green belt will still apply. The NPPF

[Matthew Pennycook]

makes it clear that, when plans are considering the release of green-belt land, they must demonstrate that they have examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting identified needs, including making use of brownfield land and optimising the density of developments. This is a point that I have made on several other occasions: there is a sequential approach to plan making to green-belt release, and it is very clearly set out what the Government intend in that regard.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): My apologies, Dr Huq, for my late arrival to the Committee. I am grateful to the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley, for moving the amendment, which stands in my name. I seek a more detailed assurance from the Minister. I appreciate that he is not in a position to comment on the specifics of individual cases, but yesterday I raised something that is very pertinent: the decision of the Secretary of State on the Abbots Langley development.

It was a longstanding principle of the approach to green belt that, where there were hard boundaries such as motorways, rivers and railway lines, the preservation of green space between them and adjoining settlements was very important, because it creates a green boundary and some additional space to reduce air pollution. The Secretary of State's decision in respect of the national planning policy framework 2025 is effectively to redesignate all such land as grey belt. Areas that our constituents clearly understood were directly protected and were in the green belt have effectively, at the stroke of a pen, been redesignated as grey belt and eligible for development. That is why these amendments are so important. We need to guarantee that those vital green spaces, which provide a bit of a cushion between hard infrastructure and people's residences, will be preserved and protected. Without commenting on that specific case, will the Minister address the legitimate concerns raised by that decision?

Matthew Pennycook: I will make a couple of points in response to the hon. Gentleman's comments. I understand his argument, but I go back to the point that what we are doing in this clause and others in this part of the Bill is setting out a framework for spatial development strategies for cross-boundary strategic planning. National planning policy is already in place in those areas and is very clear. The national planning policy framework sets out the considerations for deciding whether development in the green belt is appropriate.

The definition of grey belt is set out in the glossary of the NPPF. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it includes previously developed land in the green belt, such as disused petrol stations, and other land that, although formally designated green belt, does not strongly contribute to green belt purposes. The test of what qualifies as grey belt is very clear in the NPPF, and that is supplemented by planning policy guidance. For every application, there will be a judgment about how the national policy applies—the hon. Gentleman will understand, for the reasons he has outlined, why I will not comment on specifics.

I repeat that it will not be for SDSs to allocate plots of land; that will be for local plans and neighbourhood plans. Where the release of green-belt land is necessary, the Government are asking authorities to prioritise the release of brownfield land within the green belt, along the lines I have just discussed. Our proposal in the Bill to allow spatial development strategies to specify infrastructure of strategic importance or an amount of distribution of affordable housing does not change the existing requirements in relation to the release of green-belt land. On that basis, I ask the hon. Gentleman not to press amendment 75.

I can assure the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine that the Government are committed to maintaining strong protections on agricultural land, but I do not consider amendment 82 to be necessary to achieve that objective. Strategic planning authorities will need to consider national policy when preparing their SDSs. The NPPF is clear that authorities should make best use of brownfield land before considering development on other types of land, including agricultural land. Planning policy already recognises the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. If the development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer-quality land should be prioritised.

The Government are supplementing the national planning policy that is in place in respect of this issue with a land use framework, which has gone out to consultation. That will set out the Government's vision for long-term land use change, including by exploring what improvements are needed to the agricultural land classification system to support effective land use decisions. We all agree on the need, on such a constrained island, to make the most effective use of land possible.

When it comes to issues such as solar farms, which we have discussed in the Chamber many times, I want to ensure the debate is proportionate. Even in some of the most optimistic scenarios I have seen for solar deployment, no more than 1% of agricultural land will be released. That is why the National Farmers Union and other bodies have called for a proportionate debate in this area. It will be necessary in certain circumstances to release agricultural land, but that must clearly proceed on the basis of national planning policy.

In the event that spatial development strategies do not meet the requirements in the NPPF, the Bill gives the Secretary of State a range of intervention powers to ensure consistency with national policies. For those reasons, I am confident that there is adequate planning policy and guidance already in place to describe requirements for development on different types of land tenures.

New clause 104, in the name of the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington, also focuses on green-belt developments. It seeks to prevent development on green-belt land for 20 years or more after a green belt review has been completed. As hon. Members know, the Government are committed to preserving green belts, which have served England's towns and cities well over many decades, not least in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas and preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another. That remains the case.

I emphasise the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Barking. Not only did the green belt expand between 1979 and 1997—it almost doubled to just over 1.6 million hectares—but we saw a significant amount of green-belt land release, in what I would argue was a completely haphazard manner, under the last Government.

It is not the case that this Government have introduced green-belt land release for the first time, and through the changes to national policy we are trying to introduce a strategic approach to green-belt land designation and release so that we release the right parts of the green belt first. Our revised national planning policy framework maintains strong protections for the green belt and preserves the long-standing green-belt purposes. It also underlines our commitment to a brownfield-first approach.

However, we know that there is not enough brownfield land in this country, and not least brownfield land that is viable and in the right locations to meet housing demand and needs. That is why we ask local authorities who cannot meet their needs through it to review their green-belt land to identify opportunities to create more affordable, sustainable and well designed developments. In doing so, we expect authorities to prioritise the development of brownfield land and low quality grey-belt land in the first instance.

High performing green-belt land and land safeguarded for environmental reasons will still be protected, and our new golden rules will ensure that development that takes place on the green belt benefits communities in nature, including the delivery of high numbers of affordable housing. That is a really important point to stress once again. Given the value that the public attribute to the green belt, the Government clearly expect that through our golden rules the communities that see development take place on it will benefit in a way that is slightly different from other forms of development.

The framework is clear that where it is necessary—only in exceptional circumstances—to alter green-belt boundaries, that must be done using the local plan process of public consultation and formal examination by planning inspectors. The framework is clear that development can be committed in the green belt only in specific prescribed exceptional circumstances. Beyond that, it can happen only in very special circumstances. That is a high bar.

Given that statutory plans secure the designated status of green-belt land and that planning policy already demands the rational and evidence-based application of green-belt protection for plans and decisions, I do not consider amendment to be necessary. In the same way as I have politely asked Opposition Front-Bench Members to withdraw their amendments, I hope the hon. Member will feel content to withdraw this amendment, for the reasons that I have outlined.

Paul Holmes: As always, I appreciate the Minister's very detailed response. However, we tabled these amendments to set a precedent. We welcome the Minister's clear words about how there is an anticipation and a want from the Government's policy agenda, particularly through the NPPF, for a brownfield-first strategy. He therefore has nothing to fear from allowing some of these new spatial development strategy boards to have that precedence underlying how they are acting and operating.

The Minister is absolutely right that those boards do not allocate sites, but there is an argument to be made about where those boards, in their constitution through the national legislation that is being set up, are guided by precedence that is overwhelmingly backed, as he clearly said, by other legislation and guidance from his Department. He therefore has nothing to fear from amendments 72 and 75.

On amendment 82, I completely understand the Minister's point. It would be churlish for any politician to stand up and say there should be absolutely no development on agricultural land. That is a fair challenge, and that is not what the amendment's parameters seek to establish. He was right that development will be needed on such sites on occasions, but again, the amendment would clearly set out that the most valuable productive agricultural land—not in terms of financial value—would have precedence in the guidelines of these new boards.

Again, the Minister should not fear the intentions of the amendment. He clearly set out that he agrees—much more than I thought he would—with some of the aims and aspirations behind the amendments. Apparently, his Government agree with those intentions and will cover them through other means. He should not fear the amendments. I politely ask him to accept them, although I know that he will not change his mind.

10.30 am

I turn to new clause 104, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington. I wholly endorse the aspirations behind the new clause and the mechanisms with which he is trying to protect greenfield sites by clearly placing a responsibility on local authorities. However, once local authorities have done that work, they and the public need certainty that there will be a period of time—20 years under the provisions of the hon. Gentleman's new clause—during which those sites will be left alone. That would be through work that has been done by locally led politicians and those in their offices, who know their areas well. I look to him for assurance and he could do that with a nod.

Gideon Amos *indicated assent.*

Paul Holmes: That does not mean to say that once they are reviewed again after 20 years, those sites might not be allocated, but that is the choice of the local authority and the local people that are leading that piece of work.

I say to the hon. Gentleman that he would have our support for new clause 104 if he decided to press it to a Division. However, there is a clear precedent and reason why we have tabled our three amendments. I say to the Minister that we must go for a brownfield-first approach, with an acceptance that we must protect green-belt land when urban development is not possible. We must also protect the most valuable and productive agricultural land in the country through the planning system and Government regulation. We intend to press amendments 72, 75 and 82 to a vote. I hope that the Liberal Democrats also press theirs to a vote.

Gideon Amos: I rise simply to confirm that we will press new clause 104 to a vote.

The Chair: New clause 104 will come later. We are debating amendment 72 now.

Matthew Pennycook: I will be brief because I can see that the hon. Members opposite are intent on pressing the amendments to a vote. I have a couple of things to say, at risk of eroding the fondness that hon. Members opposite have expressed for me in recent days. That is troubling, but I will continue none the less.

[Matthew Pennycook]

What can I gently say to the shadow Minister? I think he must have forgotten—because I am sure he has not overlooked it—that it is not the case that the Government have been converted to the Opposition's view on the subject. From day one, we have been clear about the stipulations in terms of a brownfield-first approach, and the approach to green-belt release that I have outlined. They were clear in the NPPF changes, and they remain the case. I gently challenge the hon. Members by asking them to think again.

SDSs are intended to be high-level plans for housing growth and the allocation of infrastructure investment. They are not big local plans; they do not need to do everything in national planning policy. The logic of the argument of the hon. Member for Hamble Valley is that we transcribe all national planning policy into SDSs and have requirements. The requirements are already there, they apply, and regard will need to be given to them in the development and production of SDSs. For those reasons, I do not think that the amendments are necessary. I humbly ask hon. Members to give a final thought about whether we need a Division.

David Simmonds: Again, at the risk of a political love-in taking place, I am grateful to the Minister for the way in which he has dealt with all of the debates extremely courteously, and he has responded in detail. However, there is a genuine point of principle. I gently respond to him on a point that I raised earlier. We have had a lot of assurances that there is a shared direction of travel around the protection of the green belt.

However, the first significant decision that has been taken by the Secretary of State, in line with the planning practice guidance from February 2025, has driven a coach and horses through the expectations that were set about how that protection will operate. I think that that has stiffened the resolve on this side, so that we are now saying that we need to press the issue, because it is clear that whatever undertakings appear to be made, the reality is that decisions to develop on the green belt, in places that constituents reasonably expect to be protected, are being taken. Therefore, we need to ensure that, as far as possible, we secure those protections in the legislation.

Matthew Pennycook: As I have already said, I will not speak about two individual decisions that have been made. However, I say to the hon. Gentleman that the concern that he outlines—that is, a particular decision that he does not agree with—will not be resolved by trying to transcribe national planning policy into the SDS process. National planning policy remains in force, and I do not think it is necessary that in order to achieve the aims that are set out, which the Government agree with—in terms of brownfield first and a strategic approach to green belt release—for the amendments to be agreed. I ask hon. Members to think again, but reading the room, I think they are certain about pressing the amendment to a vote. The Government will resist it.

Paul Holmes: I would like to press the amendment to a vote.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 10.

Division No. 6]

AYES

Amos, Gideon	Glover, Olly
Chowns, Ellie	Holmes, Paul
Cocking, Lewis	Simmonds, David

NOES

Caliskan, Nesil	Martin, Amanda
Dickson, Jim	Murphy, Luke
Ferguson, Mark	Pennycook, Matthew
Grady, John	Pitcher, Lee
Kitchen, Gen	Taylor, Rachel

Question accordingly negatived.

The Chair: We now come to amendment 29—

Ellie Chowns: Are we not having three more votes?

The Chair: No, because the debate was now, but the votes on amendments 75 and 82 and new clause 104 will come later.

Ellie Chowns: Sorry, but did we just vote on amendments 72, 75 and 82?

The Chair: Just 72 on its own.

Gideon Amos: So when do we vote on amendments 75 and 82 and new clause—

The Chair: This afternoon, probably, after lunch. [Hon. Members: "Why?"] They are in that sequence on the amendment paper.

Gen Kitchen (Wellingborough and Rushden) (Lab): I know we vote on new clause 104 later. But will we vote on amendments 75 and 82 now?

The Chair: If you look at your amendment paper, page 7 has got amendment 75, but we are only on page 2 now.

Gen Kitchen: Is it not that they are grouped together, so we vote on them as a group?

The Chair: They are grouped for purposes of debate, but the vote comes later.

Paul Holmes: On a point of order, Dr Huq. I am not questioning the Clerk, who has been fantastic, or you as Chair, but I simply do not understand. It may be that I am being thick and stupid. All week we have had votes on the amendment paper listed by grouping, which I have been following. We have votes on amendments in the order they have appeared in the selection list.

I understand that new clauses are slightly different, but the precedent from the previous sessions is that we have voted on Opposition and other amendments tabled in the order they appear in the groupings. Can you explain why, on this occasion, we have voted on Opposition

amendment 72, but amendments 75 and 82 come later? I am not challenging your decision; I am just seeking your clarification.

The Chair: The Clerk will talk to you afterwards. We want to go to Prime Minister's Question Time—there are Members in the Committee Room who have questions at PMQs. As I said, amendment 122 was another example of an amendment where the debate and the vote were separate—I said that it had been previously debated.

Gideon Amos: I beg to move amendment 29, in clause 47, page 65, line 36, at end insert—

"(2A) A spatial development strategy must have regard to the need to provide 150,000 new social homes nationally a year."

This amendment would require spatial development strategy to have regard to the need to provide 150,000 social homes nationally a year.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 73, in clause 47, page 66, line 8, after "describe" insert

"(subject to the conditions in subsection (5A))".

Amendment 17, in clause 47, page 66, line 15, at end insert

"; (c) a specific density of housing development which ensures effective use of land and which the strategic planning authority considers to be of strategic importance to the strategy area."

This amendment requires strategic planning authorities to include a specific housing density in their plans which ensures land is used effectively where it is considered strategically important.

Amendment 35, in clause 47, page 66, line 15, at end insert—

"(c) the particular features or characteristics of communities or areas covered by the strategy which new development must have regard to in order to support and develop a sense of belonging and sense of place;

(d) a design style to which development taking place in part or all of the area covered by the strategy must have regard;

(e) any natural landmarks or features to which development should be sympathetic."

Amendment 74, in clause 47, page 66, line 15, at end insert—

"(5A) Where a spatial development strategy specifies or describes an amount or distribution of housing, the strategy must not—

(a) increase the number of homes to be developed in any part of the strategy area by more than 20%, or

(b) reduce the required number of homes to be developed by more than 20% in area part of a strategy area which is an urban area, when compared to the previous spatial development strategy or the amount of housing currently provided in the relevant area.

(5B) In subsection (5A) "urban area" has such meaning as the Secretary of State may by regulations specify."

This amendment would place limits on changes to housing targets in a spatial development strategy.

Amendment 94, in clause 47, page 67, line 11, leave out from "means" to the end of line 14 and insert

"housing which is to be let as social rent housing.

(15) For the purposes of this section, "social rent housing" has the meaning given by paragraph 7 of the Direction on the Rent Standard 2019 and paragraphs 4 and 8 of the Direction on the Rent Standard 2023."

This amendment would define affordable housing, for the purposes of spatial development strategies, as social rent housing, as defined in the Directions on Rent Standards.

Amendment 85, in clause 47, page 67, line 13, after "2008," insert—

"(aa) housing provided by an almshouse charity,".

Gideon Amos: Amendment 29 would give effect to the Liberal Democrat target of building 150,000 new social homes per year by introducing such a requirement into spatial development strategies. It is a commitment set out in our manifesto, alongside a funding commitment of £6 billion per annum of capital investment—above current levels of affordable housing programme spending—to get to that level of provision over the course of a Parliament.

In contrast, the Government's commitment of £2 billion in affordable housing programme funding for 2026-27, for up to 18,000 homes, is welcome but, in our view, does not go far enough. For too many people, a decent home has crept out of reach. The National Housing Federation and Shelter both make it clear that at least 90,000 new social homes are needed per year, given the loss of 20,500 social homes in 2023-24. According to the New Economics Foundation, 2 million council and social rent homes have been lost to right to buy since the 1980s, but only 4% of those have been replaced—a massive sell-off, leaving far too many people out in the cold when it comes to their housing aspirations.

A bath cannot be filled if the plug has been taken out. We need to end the current system of right to buy and allow councils the power to do so. As the University of Glasgow has shown, the building of private homes—even at the rates the Government advocate—will not mean any significant reduction in house prices. We should not rely on the private sector to build those low-rent and social rent homes we need. Private sector homes are built for profit. We need private market housing, and we have consented to thousands of new homes in my Taunton and Wellington constituency. However, those homes will never be released on to the market at a rate that will diminish prices or bring rents down to the levels that most people can afford. For all those reasons, we need to build 150,000 social rent homes per year, and that is the target that this amendment seeks to install into spatial environment strategies.

Ellie Chowns: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Huq. I rise to speak to amendments 17 and 94. Can you clarify this is the correct time to do so?

The Chair: It is, yes.

Ellie Chowns: Marvellous! These amendments have been tabled by the hon. Member for North East Hertfordshire (Chris Hinchliff), and I speak to them as probing amendments. Amendment 17

"requires strategic planning authorities to include a specific housing density in their plans which ensures land is used effectively where it is considered strategically important."

In our previous debate, we discussed questions of housing density. This amendment would help ensure land is used as effectively and efficiently as possible and prevent urban sprawl by encouraging strategic planning strategies to specify the optimal level of housing densities. It is not about specifying particular levels of housing densities but making sure that, in the preparation of strategic plans, adequate attention is given to the question of housing density.

[Ellie Chowns]

That has a couple of benefits. First, it prevents unnecessary encroachment on green spaces, which, as I think we all agree, are so important—not just for nature protection but human wellbeing. It is also about ensuring that developments themselves have the life they need to succeed. The hon. Member for Barking made the point about the facilities, size and density of communities being at the critical mass to generate liveable communities. That means enough people to provide transport infrastructure and services, for example.

That is particularly relevant, as obviously our vital targets for decarbonisation require a modal shift away from short car journeys and towards active travel and public transport. Those forms of transport are especially supported by increasing housing density, so I would very much welcome the Minister's comments on that.

Amendment 94 is concerned with the definition of affordable housing in clause 47, and suggests that, for the purposes of the clause, "affordable housing" should be considered to mean "social rent housing." In our debate yesterday, it was pointed out that so-called affordable housing should be done only with air quotes around it, because so often it is not anywhere close to being affordable. We have, however, already set out in existing legislation and guidance what social rent housing means.

The reality is that in our housing market, social rented housing is the most affordable form of housing by far. In the context of a housing crisis and an increasingly and incredibly unequal housing market, it is crucial that when we set strategic plans to create affordable housing, that housing must be genuinely affordable. That has to mean social rent. I very much look forward to the Minister's comments.

10.45 am

Olly Glover: I shall keep my remarks brief, because we had a rich discussion during yesterday afternoon's session about the need for social and affordable housing. I wish to say a few words in support of amendment 29, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington, which would stipulate within a spatial development strategy the need to provide 150,000 new social homes a year nationally. It is notable that all members of the Committee made clear their support for social and affordable housing, but we had a very valid debate yesterday about how to get there.

As per the evidence I gave from my constituency, and as is the case in many others, it has become clear that leaving it to the market and hoping that that leads to sufficient affordable and social housing is not an approach that has hitherto succeeded. We on the Liberal Democrat Benches therefore very much support mandating targets and far more social homes as part of the mix, rather than just hoping it happens organically via developers and local council regulation.

Paul Holmes: On a point of process, Dr Huq, I wish to move amendments 73 and 74. Do I speak to them now and move them formally?

The Chair: You can speak to them now, and then we will come to the vote later.

Paul Holmes: Okay, I just wanted to double check. The Opposition have tabled amendments 73 and 74 to limit increases and decreases in the allocation of housing targets when being assessed by spatial development strategies. The Minister should not be surprised by this approach. We have been very clear from the beginning that we disagree fundamentally with how the Minister and the Secretary of State have decided to assess housing targets and algorithms since they took office last July.

We fundamentally disagree with what we think is a politically gerrymandering housing algorithm, as we can quite clearly see through the evidence. We believe that in the rural areas where there is a lack of infrastructure—notwithstanding that we agree that infrastructure needs to be built, although, as the Minister has said, there is no actual mechanism in the legislation to insist on an infrastructure-first approach—the housing targets outlined by the Government are political gerrymandering. In very rural areas, housing targets can sometimes be doubled, tripled or quadrupled, but in urban centres and particularly in cities, those housing targets have been reduced.

We have tabled our amendments because we believe there needs to be some guidance on spatial development strategies. There should be national guidance and regulation for the Government's approach to housing allocation: on how much they should be allowed to uplift, but also on how much that they can decrease, particularly in the amount of housing they can deliver in urban areas.

There is precedent for why we have done this. If we take my constituency of Hamble Valley as an example, there are two local authority areas. Under the Minister's proposals, Fareham borough council has gone from a yearly housing target of 470 houses to one of more than 800. Eastleigh borough council, which is already over-delivering on its annual housing targets, currently has a target of around 623. They are building 1,200 homes a year themselves because of their debt levels, which is clearly a massive overreach and increase in an area that does not have the necessary infrastructure. The doubling of that requirement for house building, including on junction 7 of the M27—I do not expect the Minister to know the geography—is leading to huge amounts of bad effects with increased traffic because of the lack of infrastructure delivered alongside the housing targets.

If the Minister looks at neighbouring Southampton city council, which is controlled by the Labour party and has delivered only 200 homes a year, whether they are affordable or for private purchase, its targets have been reduced from 1,200 a year to 1,000 a year. That is the same in nearly every urban authority that the Minister has put forward—*[Interruption.]* The Minister shakes his head, but if he looks at the evidence from the House of Commons Library, housing targets in urban council-centred areas are generally being reduced. It is happening in Southampton, and in the constituency of the hon. Member for Barking—her targets have gone down.

Need I remind the Minister that it is also happening in London? The Government's targets in London are being reduced, while the mayor has announced just this week that he wants to build on the green belt. If he is so keen to build, he should be looking at the densification of his city. He should be looking to build on brownfield sites first, as we have just discussed, and he should not be

given political cover for failure by a Minister and a Secretary of State who are reducing housing targets in predominantly Labour council areas in urban cities.

That is an argument that we have rehearsed before. I know the Minister will come back and say that he disagrees, and I expect him to do that, because he is defending his algorithm, but he cannot defend it to the people in this country. It is a politically gerrymandering algorithm that damages. It targets the failure of predominantly Labour councils in urban areas, and targets the success of predominantly rural authorities that struggle, and it punishes them. Those are the areas that have challenges that urban areas do not have in trying to match those housing targets.

We have tabled amendment 74 in such detail—to ensure that there cannot be an increase in the number of homes in any strategy area of more than 20%, or a reduction of the required number of homes in urban areas by more than 20%—to try to mitigate some of those politically motivated measures that the Government have undertaken in other areas through the national planning policy framework. That is why we are putting forward these amendments.

We have a fundamental disagreement with the Minister over the housing algorithm. He knows that we have a fundamental disagreement over housing targets and the way in which they deliver them, because we think that, where there are hugely increased housing targets, that places a burden on local authorities. The algorithm also reduces the quality of housing provided, because there is a rush to try to meet housing targets for fear of Government repercussions, but the quality of builds, the quality of the developments and the associated infrastructure and community investment goes down. Believe me, I have seen that in my local authority, and I invite the Minister to attend my constituency at any time he wants. On its boundaries, Eastleigh borough council has been building double the number of homes that are required. The financial decisions that it has made mean that the quality of development has gone down and resentment among the public has gone up. The infrastructure that has not been delivered means that people in my local area—and areas across the locality in Hampshire, just outside my constituency—suffer.

So I say to the Minister: that is why we are tabling these amendments. I know that he is going to come back to me very strongly—

Matthew Pennycook: With facts!

Paul Holmes: Well, the Minister says "facts", but he should read the House of Commons Library document on the housing targets that he proposed. He cannot deny that the rural uplift in housing targets under his algorithm is an exponential rise, but the increase under his housing algorithm for urban centres is much smaller. That is delivered by the fact that for many urban centres in cities across the United Kingdom, the number of houses required under his Government's targets has reduced.

I look forward to the Minister's "facts". I hope that he knows that we have a fundamental disagreement on this; I have said that repeatedly in the Chamber, on Second Reading, and in many Westminster Hall debates, where housing targets have been a topic of concern for many Members of Parliament across the country. As I say, I look forward to his "facts", and I look forward to his reading the House of Commons Library document that backs up the arguments that we are making. We will press this amendment to a vote.

David Simmonds: On a point of order, Dr Huq. May I seek your guidance? My hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley, the shadow Minister, has spoken to two amendments tabled in my name, which we intend to push to a vote. It is a departure from Committee procedure to vote on one amendment but not on the others, when a vote has been expected, and to set them aside. When, in the Committee proceedings, will we return to the amendments discussed earlier to vote on them?

The Chair: It goes according to the sequence in the amendment paper. At the moment we are at amendment 29, on page 3 of the amendment paper. When will we reach amendment 73, on page 5? How long is a piece of a string? We intend to reach it today, but perhaps not before the sitting is adjourned at 11.25. This was all decided in a Programming Sub-Committee at the beginning of our Committee proceedings; someone put matters in this order.

Gen Kitchen: Further to that point of order, Dr Huq. Opposition Members are very interested in their amendments, but I am keenly and acutely interested in Government amendment 48 and schedule 3. Government amendment 48 is on page 10 of the amendment paper. We have been going through the groupings of amendments on the selection list, and in previous sittings, when we have voted on amendments, we have voted on the groupings, rather than following the amendment paper. I am concerned that if we are now following the amendment paper, we should have voted today on amendments 5, 21, 22, 76, 122, 4 and 72.

Paul Holmes: We have voted on some of those.

Gen Kitchen: But we have not voted on amendment 5.

Paul Holmes: Exactly.

Gen Kitchen: So therefore we have been going through the groupings, rather than the amendment paper.

The Chair: The learned Clerk tells me that he can ventriloquise an explanation but it would be easier for him to explain after the sitting is adjourned.

Gideon Amos: Further to that point of order, Dr Huq. I echo the comments of other members of the Committee. We have so far followed the groupings on the selection list, and within each group we have voted on each amendment that has been pushed to a vote. New clauses may be a different matter, but that is what has happened in the Committee to date.

Paul Holmes: Further to that point of order, Dr Huq. I do not wish to exacerbate the conversation, but the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Wellingborough and Rushden, is correct, and I am concerned that if we entertain the new way of working, even though it may be challenged, that we will lose the efficiency and rhythm that this Committee has had.

I am open to challenge by the Clerk, but in previous sittings we have followed the groupings on the selection list, which has meant that we were prepared—though of

[Paul Holmes]

course we are always prepared—and know the sequence that we are following. That was so for the whole of the Committee proceedings. This approach, following the amendment paper, has not been in action for the previous sittings of the Committee. I wholly endorse the comments made by the Government Whip. I believe that, if we could follow the groupings and vote on the amendments in order, as we take them, that would assist the Committee in getting through the process, and business of the day.

The Chair: I have been on these Committees for 10 years, and chaired them for the last five years, and as far as I understand, this is the way we always do it. We often say a measure "was debated earlier". It just seems to be coincidence that the decisions fell as they did yesterday—or whenever it was. This is, I have been told, non-negotiable.

David Simmonds: Further to that point of order, Dr Huq. I return to the question: can you indicate when in the Committee proceedings we will return to vote on those amendments?

The Chair: That depends on how succinct or verbose people are. I am not Mystic Meg. The Committee will decide on those amendments whenever it gets to them in the amendment paper.

Paul Holmes: Further to that point of order, Dr Huq. I know you want to discuss this matter with the Clerk after the sitting adjourns. I wholly welcome that. Perhaps we should all attend, so that we can learn. It must be the case, Dr Huq, that you can give us an indication. I get the point about the verbosity and speed of colleagues on the Committee, but it would benefit Committee members if we knew whether we will vote on the various amendments that we have tabled at the end of the discussion of clause 47, or whether those votes could come at a later stage, after the discussion of the clause. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner is seeking that guidance and would appreciate a general steer.

The Chair: These things are often negotiated by the two Whips: they make it happen at a certain time. Any vote on amendment 73 will come after the debate on amendment 88—that will be today—and amendment 74 will come after that.

David Simmonds: On a point of order, Dr Huq. The groupings have been negotiated by the Whips. The Chair's selection of amendments is in that order, and votes have followed that process.

The Chair: The Clerk helpfully suggests that we could suspend the sitting to give members a primer on this matter.

11 am

Sitting suspended.

11.7 am

On resuming—

The Chair: I call Luke Murphy.

Luke Murphy (Basingstoke) (Lab): Thank you, Dr Huq; it is a delight to serve under your chairship. Listeners to the debate have missed out on an entertaining discussion of the procedure of voting on amendments and clauses. I rise to comment briefly to amendment 29.

I do not think that anyone on the Government Benches disagrees with the notion that we need to build more genuinely affordable homes and social rent homes, but I do not think that the amendment fully accounts for the cost of 150,000 additional social homes. A generously low grant rate for a social home is around £183,000 a year, and that would be just over 30,000 homes a year, so there is a significant gap between what the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington proposes and what can be afforded through the amount of money that is being suggested.

I also gently remind Opposition Members that the largest cut to the affordable homes budget occurred in 2010, under the coalition Government. The hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington and I have debated that previously. That was a 66% cut in the affordable homes budget, and we would not be in this situation had such a significant cut not been enacted.

Matthew Pennycook: Amendments 29, 73, 17, 74 and 94 would introduce additional requirements for spatial development strategies in relation to housing. They seek to specify or describe what spatial development strategies must include across a range of areas, such as housing target limits, affordable housing definitions and housing density requirements.

I thank hon. Members for their interest in the Bill's spatial development strategy provisions. However, the Government believe that these amendments are not productive in achieving the Bill's objectives. I will attempt to be succinct rather than verbose, given the time we have lost and the need to make progress on the Bill. In general terms, we think that introducing further requirements for SDSs would limit their effectiveness and operability, as well as the purpose and effect that the clause seeks to achieve.

Amendment 29, moved by the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington, would make specific provision for strategic planning authorities to have regard to the provision for new social rented homes. The Government are clearly committed to delivering more social housing, and I hope the Committee recognises the steps that we have taken over the past 10 months, including an £800 million in-year funding top-up to the 2021 to 2026 affordable homes programme; £2 billion of bridging support—I think the hon. Gentleman made a mistake in referring to it as £2 million—that will bring forward up to 18,000 new social homes; and in the multi-year spending review, the Government will set out the full details of a new grant funding programme to succeed the 2021 to 2026 affordable homes programme. In that, we are looking to prioritise the delivery of social rented homes, which is a Government priority.

Proposed new section 12D(5)(b) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 makes provision for a spatial development strategy to specify or describe an

amount or distribution of affordable housing, or any other kind of housing that the strategic planning authority considers to be of strategic importance to the strategy area. SDSs can therefore already play an important role in the delivery of social and affordable housing, if the strategic authority in question considers it necessary. Amendment 29 is therefore not necessary, and I request that the hon. Member withdraws it.

The shadow Minister tempted me into a much wider debate on the Government's revised standard method for assessing housing need, which was introduced in the updated NPPF late last year. I will not go into too much detail, but the point of difference is that, under the previous Government, a 35% urban uplift was applied to the most populous local planning authority within the country's 20 largest cities and urban centres. We have removed that urban uplift.

Paul Holmes: Why?

Matthew Pennycook: Because it was a completely arbitrary number that bore no relation to objectively assessed housing need. We have replaced it with a standard method and with targets under which city regions, as a whole, will see their targets increase by 20%, on average, compared with the previous planning period. We have increased targets across those city regions, and the new method directs housing growth to a wider range of urban centres across England. We have introduced a more ambitious, credible and objective method of assessing housing need in any given area.

On average, that gives rise to a 20% increase in city regions. The previous Government said that the 35% urban uplift applied not to London's most populous local authority but to the whole of London, which is out of kilter with all the other arrangements that they made across the country. That left London with a fantastical target that was impossible to deliver. We have rightly revised down the target, but the shadow Minister will know that we are being very clear that London needs to increase delivery quite significantly. The Mayor has taken steps in recent days to ensure that happens.

Amendments 73 and 74 would apply limitations to the extent that spatial development strategies can redistribute housing requirements over a strategy area. The distribution of housing requirements is likely to be a key role for most, if not all, spatial development strategies. It would be overly prescriptive to apply an arbitrary restraint on the ability to decide the most appropriate location for new housing. I hope that hon. Members recognise that, in many of the debates I attend, this is what their parties call for: a smarter and more strategic way for local authorities in sub-regional groups to come together and select locations for housing growth that help to absorb some of their housing target numbers in a more sensible way, where that is applicable. We do not want to be prescriptive and constrain their ability to do so in whatever way works for the sub-region in question.

11.15 am

I understand that there could be a concern that a strategic planning authority could unfairly or unreasonably place requirements for too much—or, indeed, too little—housing in any one area. However, each SDS will have to undergo public consultation and examination by a planning inspector to be found to be sound. The consultation is likely to highlight any such issues and the inspector will ensure that any SDS is appropriate and supported by relevant evidence. Given those important parts of the SDS process, I do not consider the amendments necessary and ask the shadow Minister to withdraw them.

Turning to amendment 17, as spatial development strategies cannot allocate sites for development, they would be unable to set a site-specific density for housing development for a particular location. However, I can foresee strategic planning authorities wishing to set general policies on density—for example, that housing development within x metres of a transit hub should aim for a density of y dwellings per hectare. That is very sensible. We want to increase the density of development, in particular around key transport hubs, but such policies could already be included within proposed new section 12D(1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which covers policies

"in relation to the development and use of land",

provided that they are considered to be of "strategic importance" to the area covered by the spatial development strategy. I therefore do not consider the amendment necessary in order to achieve its desired effect. I respectfully ask the hon. Member for North Herefordshire not to press it to a Division.

Turning, finally, to amendment 94, the Government are committed to prioritising the building of new social rent homes. However, social rent is not the only type of affordable housing that can help to meet the needs of an area. The amendment, in our view, would unnecessarily restrict the definition of "affordable housing" in proposed new section 12D of the 2004 Act such that homes for social rent would be the only type of affordable housing that a spatial development strategy may specify or describe an amount or distribution of.

The definition of "affordable housing" currently in the Bill gives strategic planning authorities discretion to provide for a wide range of affordable housing to best reflect the needs of their area. Narrowing that definition would prevent strategic planning authorities from making provision for other types of affordable housing, such as homes designed to provide people with affordable routes into home ownership, when specifying an amount or distribution of affordable housing of strategic importance to the strategy area. In our view, that would likely significantly reduce the amount and type of affordable housing delivered overall, so we cannot support the amendment.

For the reasons outlined, we do not think that these amendments are necessary to further the objectives of the Bill. I ask hon. Members to withdraw them.

Gideon Amos: The hon. Member for Basingstoke invited me to go down memory lane to what was happening in 2009, 2010 and so on. I am happy to do so. The Liberal Democrats went into coalition at that point. They were 9% of the Members of Parliament, but prevented a great deal of the worst excesses of the Conservative Government over that time, and continue to stand by that achievement. In fact, there was a 25% increase in affordable housing starts based on £15 billion of additional funding on affordable social housing under the coalition. In contrast, in 2009, a Labour Chancellor proposed cuts in the pre-Budget

[Gideon Amos]

papers that he called "deeper and tougher" than anything Margaret Thatcher did in the 1980s, and began a £22 billion cut in capital expenditure, which was greater than the—

Luke Murphy: Will the hon. Member give way?

Gideon Amos: I will not give way. I need to get back to the present day, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. It is important to dwell not on the proposed cuts of £22 billion to capital expenditure from 2009-10 onwards that the outgoing Labour Government were proposing, but on the reality of the situation that faces people who need social homes today. That is what amendment 29 is all about.

The hon. Member for Basingstoke suggested that the amount required per social home is £183,000. Figures from the Centre for Economics and Business Research suggest that that is actually £131,000 a home. I do not doubt his sincerity in looking at the costs of each social home, but those are our figures. Against that, our proposed investment of £6 billion would be on top of the existing affordable homes programme of £2.3 billion.

In passing, as I pointed out in my opening remarks, we recognise and respect the £2 billion investment that the Government have put into the affordable housing programme for up to 18,000 affordable homes. It is worthwhile. Our amendment simply asks the Government to go further and faster. Our commitment of £6 billion per year in our suggested budget—funded by the taxation proposals we set out there—added to the £2.3 billion of the existing affordable homes programme, would be sufficient to get us to a delivery level of 150,000 social homes per year in the course of a Parliament, according to figures from the Centre for Economics and Business Research.

Our proposals are therefore founded on some consideration of the financial costs involved and of the priority that the Government need to give to the delivery of social homes. I reiterate simply that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Didcot and Wantage pointed out, relying on the private sector to provide low-cost social housing or even to bring down the price of housing has not worked to date and is extremely unlikely, to say the least, to happen in future.

Matthew Pennycook: An important point to make is that, through the revised standard method for assessing housing need and the housing targets that flow from that, we are asking local authorities to do more to meet the housing crisis. We expect more social and affordable homes to come through under section 106 agreements.

I take issue, gently, with the assertion that I think is implicit in some of the points made by the hon. Gentleman: that we are just leaving everything to the private market and doing nothing ourselves. The fact that we have topped up the affordable homes programme by £800 million and brought forward this bridge of £2 billion in anticipation of the future grant funding to come is very much at odds with his description of leaving it all to the market. The Government are not leaving it all to the market; we are providing grant funding over and above what we inherited from the previous Government.

Gideon Amos: We have always accepted and we support that allocation of funding to social housing, but a theme in Government thinking seems to be that the delivery of more homes through the private sector will bring prices down. If the Minister wishes to correct me, he should feel free to do so. That was my central point: we cannot rely on private housing to do that. The delivery of social homes needs to be done by Government. I was pleased with the Minister's passion for delivering social homes, which he expressed clearly, and I therefore expect him to accept the amendment. It would simply increase the targets to deliver social homes to a reasonable level of 150,000 per year.

The delivery of social homes is a priority. We need to fund that to make it happen. If we really want to deliver more homes in this country, however, there are two big blockers, and they are not people, wildlife or the communities who will lose their voice in planning committees. The blockers are the funding for social housing and for infrastructure. If those two things were brought forward, I suggest that we would be able to build almost unlimited numbers of new homes.

For all those reasons we moved our amendment, which would simply take the Government's rightful ambitions and laudable objectives of delivering social homes a little further and faster, and would set a target for the first time for the delivery of social homes. We do not have such a target, but one is desperately needed if we are to address the housing crisis, as organisations across the board have attested we should, including the National Housing Federation, Shelter and so many others. On that basis, I have moved this amendment.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.
—(Gen Kitchen.)

11.24 am

Adjourned till this day at Two o'clock.