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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Friday 3 February 2017**

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# House of Commons

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*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163), and negatived.*

## Parking Places (Variation of Charges) Bill

*Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee*

### New Clause 1

#### RESTRICTION OF VARIATION

“The provisions at sections 1 and 2 do not apply where a local authority make, or propose to make, an order to increase parking charges in off-street parking places and designated parking places.” — (*Kevin Foster.*)

*This new clause would disapply the provisions of the Bill when a local authority proposes to increase parking charges for off-street or on-street parking.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

9.34 am

**Kevin Foster:** I beg to move, That the clause be now read a Second time.

I welcome the broad thrust of the Bill, not least in the context of my time in local government. When we wanted to do something to support retailers at Christmas or some other event, we found that altering parking charges in a local authority car park or other location required a formal consultation, although the likelihood of someone writing to us to say “I would like to pay more to park my car” was virtually nil. When I was both the cabinet member for economic regeneration and the deputy leader of a council, we were spending thousands of pounds to achieve next to nothing. In some cases, we would find that we were not able to do what we wanted to do.

My new clause is intended to probe the views of the Bill’s promoter, my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), and those of my hon. Friend the Minister, with whom, when we occupied our respective posts in adjoining local authorities, I had exchanges for many years on everything from regeneration plans to council tax. It is a pleasure to see him in the Chamber today, and I look forward to hearing his comments later.

The current consultation procedures are intended to protect motorists and town centres from higher charges, but I wanted to make it clear beyond doubt that the Bill’s aim was to make it easier to reduce parking charges rather than making it easier to increase them. The Bill will certainly be helpful to Torbay. Each year,

we have winter charges and standard charges. Standard charges apply throughout the summer and are slightly higher than the discounted winter rates, because in winter large car parks near a beach are unlikely to be particularly full. We do have some hardy swimmers, though, and there is usually a large event every Boxing day in both Torquay and Paignton. I see the Minister nodding: he is welcome to join us for a nice refreshing dip on a Boxing day morning. The requirement is to get one’s hair wet, to show that one has really gone into the water.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): As always, my hon. Friend has brought to the House a wealth of experience of the council in his constituency. May I ask him how the new clause would work in practice?

**Kevin Foster:** In practice, it would work in the same way as the Bill, but it makes it absolutely clear that the Bill deals only with circumstances in which car parking charges are being lowered temporarily, and that there is no prospect of orders, for instance, to increase them. Local newspapers have strongly defended the requirement for formal notifications and consultations, and rightly so, but the new clause is intended to make clear that that will apply only when parking charges are not being increased.

**Wendy Morton:** Is my hon. Friend saying that he does not think councils should be able to raise parking charges if they need to do so?

**Kevin Foster:** No. I think it is clear that if a local authority decided that raising charges was appropriate, it would be able to do so under the existing procedures, although consultation would be necessary, and, obviously, the authority would be answerable to its electors. Any authority considering increasing car parking charges must carefully consider the overall impact, not just whether it will get a couple of thousand pounds extra from a car park. The Local Government Finance Bill Committee this week heard evidence—the Minister was present—from the Federation of Small Businesses about the impact that increasing car park charges can have on town centres and on businesses. Local authorities will in future have 100% retention of business rates, and if a town centre is not regenerating and does not have people shopping in it, that will hit the bottom line as much as not getting an extra 10p from each car that parks in the car park.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): My hon. Friend is talking about giving councils the flexibility to lower prices in order to stimulate high streets, yet areas that are highly stimulated by an event—a celebration of Shakespeare’s 400th birthday, perhaps, this year—might wish to direct drivers to a park-and-ride, for instance, to avoid an absolute blockage in the town centre. Many of us have great events in our towns. May we have a temporary uplift, deterring people from parking in the town centre while an event is going on, and reduce it afterwards? This amendment sounds a little heavy-handed, if my hon. Friend does not mind my saying so.

**Kevin Foster:** I do not think my hon. Friend’s intervention is heavy-handed at all; it is right that we discuss probing amendments to Bills robustly on the Floor of the House.

[Kevin Foster]

There is already some provision in this regard. My own authority, Torbay, held the Torbay airshow last year. It was clear that one of its car parks would be very congested, so to avoid undue congestion it closed the car park for the day of the airshow but arranged for to be booked via a separate means. The solution met the need on the day, but if it was put in place more widely and challenged there would be a question about whether it was the right way to proceed. It was just a fix for the day.

If a council is going to look to take money out of large events in the manner suggested—for a market day-style event—it should go through a proper consultation process. One way of ensuring that large crowds do not come to events is for people to attend, park in a car park and feel they have been ripped off for parking; traffic congestion reduces the following year, because no one comes back. There is clearly a balance to be struck. It is great to have events that draw people into town centres. I am the Member for Torquay and Paignton, and most days of the week my town centre has problems with lots of people wanting to park and shop, causing congestion; that is quite a pleasant problem to deal with, compared with the issues of the decline of the town centre that we have seen over the last 30 to 40 years.

I believe in local democracy. Councils do need to have the ability to decide to increase parking charges, and ultimately be accountable to voters for that. We can all think of instances of a council controlled by our party deciding to make a quick buck out of car parking, but paying the price for it at the ballot box shortly afterwards.

**Wendy Morton:** On raising car parking charges and car parking charges in general, must not revenue from car parking charges—the Minister might confirm this later—go into improving parking facilities and not go to other parts of council funding?

**Kevin Foster:** No, councils can make a reasonable surplus from their car parking and contribute it to their bottom line. It is a shame that my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) is not present, as I think he would confirm that the town council in Stratford-on-Avon owns the car parks, rather than the district council, and, given the popularity of Stratford as a visitor destination, almost funds its operations—legitimately—through its car park ownership.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Increasing parking charges may be legitimate, but it might have a very damaging effect on local businesses. Is not the Bill's purpose under clause 2(2) to give local authorities opportunities to put in place different conditions? If they want to raise charges, they might have to go through a consultation, but if they want to lower them, it makes it easier for them to do so, whereas my hon. Friend's amendment allows them to do virtually anything without consultation?

9.45 am

**Kevin Foster:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend in terms of the overall theory. On putting up car parking charges—I am thinking particularly about local authorities

and those sitting on the Local Authority Bill Committee with me on this point—business rates growth will benefit councils. Councils could decide to use discounts on car parking to incentivise investment, which then delivers more in business rates. In the past—certainly when I was in local government in a leading position—if I had done that, I would have taken the hit from the drop in parking revenue, but the national Exchequer would have taken the benefit of increased business rates and people coming off jobseeker's allowance and getting into work. If we were lucky, we might have had a small share of some of that income a bit later, once we had applied for it. My hon. Friend makes a strong point.

I should point out, however, that my amendment makes it clear that the Bill's provisions should

“not apply where a local authority make, or propose to make, an order to increase parking charges in off-street parking places and designated parking places.”

My amendment would still allow the thrust of this Bill where there is a proposal to drop parking charges, but I want it to be clearer that no order is being created under this Bill to increase parking charges.

I agree that it is absolutely right to have a system to lower parking charges, rather than to increase them. As I said in my opening remarks, I cannot remember receiving a letter from someone demanding the right to pay an extra pound or two when they park their car. If I had done, I would have made it clear that they were welcome to overpay if they wanted—it is quite an easy thing to do.

I might withdraw this amendment later, depending on what I hear, particularly about the Minister's intentions in respect of the powers created under the Bill, but I wanted to explore the Bill's provisions on lowering parking charges, to ensure that it is not about getting around the statutory consultation process for increasing them.

**Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): Some councils, however, do not lower parking charges but use them as cash cows—my own local authority, Calderdale, being one of them. Would my hon. Friend like to comment on that aspect of the issue?

**Kevin Foster:** Yes, I will be very happy to comment on that. I have no problem with a local authority looking to make a reasonable return from its car parking asset to ensure that it can maintain it and support its wider corporate objectives. However, my hon. Friend is absolutely right that some seem to view parking as a cash cow or, even worse, have some deluded anti-motorist position and think that if they whack their car parking charges up massively everyone will get the bus instead. The reality is that people look at one town centre and then look at another town centre or an out-of-town shopping centre and say, “If that place is just going to try to rip me off and view me as a cash cow, I am going to go somewhere else.” We particularly notice that in certain Labour-run local authorities—Calderdale might be one. They take a view that is more anti-business and anti-growth and decide to try to milk motorists by imposing charges that in reality will just put people off, or, even worse, are deliberately used to target those who work in the town centre and, because of where they live, cannot use public transport. In some market towns and cities people living in surrounding rural areas have little choice about

how they travel to work. If their annual charges go up—or season tickets or daily prices—that will hit their income, effectively taxing it via the back door. I completely agree with my hon. Friend on that. Some councils seem to view parking as a cash cow, and we need to make it clear that while there is no problem with making a reasonable return, we do not want councils to engage in the rip-off behaviour that we see from some private sector operators. At the end of the day, a council has a wider duty to its whole area, not just to what it thinks it can get away with when making money from parking.

Overall, the Bill is welcome. As I touched on in response to an earlier intervention, having two systems makes sense: one for lowering charges and a completely different one for putting them up. Over the past few years, the Government have looked to strengthen the fairness of the enforcement of parking charges.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way.

**Kevin Foster:** I will give way in a moment.

I can think of an example from my constituency. Crossways car park in Paignton is a privately run car park in the town centre. It looks cheap on the outside, but people discover a rather nasty surprise when they go in: the ridiculously strict enforcement of the private sector operator. I will perhaps say more about that in another debate, but people receiving £100 fines for minor infractions is starting to have quite an impact. The House has rightly moved to ensure that local authorities cannot use extreme enforcement and to get rid of cowboy clampers, but I want the law to be structured to protect motorists, which is why my new clause is about making it clear that the new system should be used only to decrease the price of parking. My hon. Friend has been waiting patiently, so I will now give way.

**Helen Whately:** My hon. Friend is clearly extremely well versed in such matters, so I want him to help me fully understand his new clause. The Bill proposes to make it easier for councils to decrease parking charges, and my hon. Friend wants to ensure that it is not so easy for councils to increase parking charges, but my understanding is that that is also the thrust of the Bill, as councils would have to consult before increasing charges. Will he explain why he feels that the Bill does not achieve what he is trying to achieve with his new clause?

**Kevin Foster:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. To be clear, I absolutely welcome the thrust of the Bill, as I have said on a couple of occasions, and making it easier to reduce car parking charges by having two separate systems. The Bill removes the need for formal adverts in local newspapers and reduces the length of consultation periods when prices are being reduced, but I tabled the new clause to probe whether that is the Bill's definitive intention. I do not note any specific wording stating that the Bill is purely about decreasing parking charges. I accept that that is absolutely the intention of my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth, and I look forward to the Minister confirming that that is the Government's intention, but I felt that it was appropriate to explore the matter further. I had hoped to see specific

mention made of reducing charges, and I will consider withdrawing my new clause based on the commentary I hear today, but it is right to explore whether the Bill is purely about decreasing car parking charges.

A decrease in charges could perhaps be used to encourage people to attend special events. Classic examples of when many councils may decide to use such measures are Armistice Day or Remembrance Day. Many councils have a policy of not enforcing standard parking charges on certain days of the year, but that is legally a bit messy. People should pay in theory but may see a sign saying, "We are not enforcing the rules today." The Bill would allow that sort of thing and allow discounts on particular days or for particular events. The other classic examples are Christmas day and Boxing day. Both are easily included in orders about off-street parking, but that is more difficult with moveable feasts. I fully accept that councils should not draw up exhaustive lists of every single event or every day on which they may want to take 50p off car parking or make it free for an hour or two. As I have said, I welcome the thrust of the Bill, but I want it to be clear that it is only about creating a system to make it easier to reduce, not increase, car parking charges.

The Bill is worthwhile and I am delighted to see it making progress. It is about reducing burdens, reducing bureaucracy and ensuring that money is not spent on pointless consultations—something that I will mention in the not too distant future when discussing my Bill—but I want its intention to be clear. That is why I tabled the new clause, which I hope will provide the basis for some debate, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments. Again, I stress that I absolutely welcome the Bill, making it easier to reduce car parking charges for particular events, but that is not explicit in the Bill.

Our legislation and debates should be clear. Someone sat in the Gallery or watching at home should be able to understand our exact intention from reading the Bill and when we make provisions. If I go down the Dog and Duck tonight and say, "Someone is thinking of making provisions about something under legislation," the response would be, "What on earth are you talking about?" not, "Oh yes. They're talking about offering a discount deal in the car park the next time there is an event." That is why it is appropriate to explore the Bill in more depth on the Floor of the House and to suggest this new clause. I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply and to deciding whether to press the new clause to a vote.

**Wendy Morton:** I want to say a few words about my hon. Friend's new clause. I can see the sentiment behind it, because he is drawing attention to the Bill's title: Car Parking (Variation of Charges). I appreciate that that is the jargon and legalese of this place, but to a member of the public, a taxpayer or a constituent, "Variation of Charges" does not make it 100% clear whether the Bill is about prices going up or down, so I now start to see why my hon. Friend tabled his new clause. That said, I read it for a while and tried to understand where it would fit in the Bill, which is why I asked at the start of the debate how it would work in practice. Quite frankly, I could not see its point—[*Interruption.*] I suppose I must apologise to my hon. Friend. He made a good argument, but I am not going to agree with him on this occasion.

**Kevin Foster:** I totally accept the intention of this noble and worthwhile Bill, but it is not made absolutely explicit to someone who picks up the Bill or reads it on the Parliament website that it is about variation down, not variation up. That was the point of tabling the new clause.

**Wendy Morton:** That was the point that I was endeavouring to get across. It is about the wording. My hon. Friend referred to speaking to constituents at the Dog and Duck. I do not think we have a Dog and Duck in Aldridge-Brownhills—if I am wrong, I am sure that somebody will soon tell me—but we do have many other good watering holes. When we get an opportunity as Members of Parliament to ensure that our constituents fully understand the legislation that we are taking through this place, that can only be a good thing. I hope that my hon. Friend will not press the new clause to a vote, because I know how I will be voting. I will be speaking on Third Reading because my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) has promoted a good, straightforward Bill that will help constituencies, constituents and local authorities right across the country. I am looking forward to listening and contributing further over the course of this morning's debate.

10 am

**Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con):** Like my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), I have a slight problem with the intention behind this new clause because it strikes me as a bit of a blunt tool, as I will explain. In my constituency there is The Dog at Norton. I am not sure whether I have a Dog and Duck, but Bury St Edmunds is the home of Greene King and I have the Dog and Partridge. I have quite a lot of pubs, and I am racking my brain.

In Bury St Edmunds I have a vibrant town that bucks the trend, and in that I see a problem with the bluntness of this amendment. The amendment would be perfect in Stowmarket, Needham Market and my other market towns, where we must do everything we can to increase the vibrancy of the high street—we need that flexibility—but I assume that the whole point of the Bill is to give us flexibility. It strikes me that the amendment is trying to do what we do so well in this House, which is to pin our arm behind our back and write legislation that does not do what we first intended and is less flexible than we want.

**Kevin Foster:** I respect my hon. Friend's comments about the strength of Bury St Edmunds, but in other parts of the country, and certainly in England, we have councils that view their town centre as a bit of a cash cow, which is really hurting the economy. That is why we need to be clear and make sure that a council's arm is behind its back. This is about reducing parking charges, not varying them upwards.

**Jo Churchill:** Surely my hon. Friend takes my point that local councils are, in the main, the people who should be deciding this. We have a very confused landscape. In Stratford-on-Avon, as he mentioned, the town council owns the car park. In two-tier authorities, the county council often owns car parks in towns that do not have the ability to flex the charges and use the money for their locality, as happens in ours. In such a situation,

variation might happen, but because somebody else is setting the rules, it is not driven by the people in the locality who want the outcomes that he seeks.

I would welcome the creation of local accountability that gives people within borough councils or district councils in two-tier authorities the ability to set the rates and collect the revenue. At the moment, it is a longwinded process, in that it takes two years to apply for various changes in legislation, and so on. In Bury St Edmunds, a town of 40,000 people, there were 550 long-stay car park uses and 1.387 million short-stay car park uses last year.

We have problems in the medieval grid, and I was pleased to see the masterplan come out this week. It says that we will have a policy of using varying procedures to stop the off-street parking that blights so many people's lives, particularly in the medieval quarter of the town. We must provide solutions and give local councils the ability to set the right solutions, and the masterplan encourages a blend of "pedestrian first" measures to restore and keep the medieval grid for pedestrians, tourists, shoppers and residents. The small grid, which is not only beautiful but historic, needs attention to make sure that it is not blighted by parking. I agree with my hon. Friend that we have a vibrant economic environment and that people need to park for work. Luckily, we have a wonderful tourist attraction that draws people to the town, but other market towns very much need the flexibility to vary parking charges.

What concerns me is that, with this amendment, we might be using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) said, the amendment seeks to do what is already in the Bill.

**Kevin Foster:** There are already provisions for local authorities to increase parking charges if they wish to do so, and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) said that councils have done that. All I am seeking to do with the amendment is to limit the new powers in the Bill to reducing parking charges. The existing powers to increase car park prices via the normal consultation processes will still be there.

**Jo Churchill:** Fine, but that takes me back to my earlier point, which is that that is already in the Bill. Are we not just adding a bit of jam to the cake?

**David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con):** This has already been a passionate debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) on moving this probing amendment. I hope I can convince him and my other hon. Friends, many of whom are here today, that he does not need to press it.

No amendments were moved in Committee on Wednesday, so the Bill was reported to the House unamended. This new clause is a somewhat late entry in the race.

**Kevin Foster:** I was not a member of the Committee, so I could not move an amendment at that stage. I am therefore raising the issue on Report. I am just clarifying the situation for those who are not familiar with the procedure of the House.

**David Tredinnick:** I am in error because I should clearly have asked my hon. Friend to join the Committee. He would have made a major contribution. One of the privileges of introducing a private Member's Bill is that one has some influence over the membership of the Committee, and it is good to see my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), who served on the Committee, sitting behind the Treasury Bench. The Committee examined the Bill with some care.

At the end of Second Reading, I said:

"I can say in all honesty that this modest two-clause Bill will improve the quality of life in every city and town in this country. I am...grateful for the Government's support."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2016; Vol. 617, c. 1195.]

I am pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), who is my neighbour across the A5, Watling Street. No doubt he will have some remarks to make. As the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), will know, the Labour party supported the Bill in Committee, and I hope that we continue to have his support today.

This is a simple Bill. In fact, my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope), who is not known as a great friend of private Members' legislation, whispered in my ear one day—being a very educated man and a classical scholar, perhaps—that this is a de minimis Bill, which I interpreted as meaning that there is very little in it. I have to tell you, Mr Speaker, and my hon. Friends that that was the point of this Bill. I was No. 5 on the list, and, having decided to run with this issue, I felt it had to be a simple Bill that appealed to all parts of the House. I did not want it to attract controversy and encourage colleagues to speak for a very long time and perhaps impede its progress.

You may recall, Mr Speaker, that, in an impromptu remark on Second Reading, I described this as a Santa Claus Bill, as we were in the run-up to Christmas. The first and perhaps most important provision of this Bill is that it allows councils to reduce parking charges without giving 21 days' notice in their local newspaper or in the media. It is increasingly important that councils have flexibility, and I will explain why in a moment. The second part of the Bill is to force councils to consult on increasing charges, but it does not affect the charges themselves.

Let me just refer to Santa Claus again. I was somewhat stunned when I went into the shop in the House in the run-up to Christmas and found a tree decoration of Father Christmas holding the Santa Act 2016. Clearly, I had been able to inspire somebody in the House authorities to produce this Christmas decoration, but it was a little premature in that the decoration referred to an Act. I can assure you, Mr Speaker, that, as a slightly superstitious Member, I would not conceive of putting such a decoration on a tree until my Bill had been enacted.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Whether, and to what extent, the hon. Gentleman indulges in retail therapy and what assessment he has made of the aesthetic merits of such attractions in the shop or no is a matter of consuming, almost intoxicating, interest to Members of the House, but I question whether it is altogether relevant to the particular subject matter that is supposed to be under discussion. Knowing him, I feel sure that he will have a response.

**David Tredinnick:** I am flattered, Mr Speaker, that you should call me back to this point and ask me to explain myself. I also crave your indulgence, because in Committee I did, in error, produce the Christmas decoration and was rightly called to order, as we cannot call devices in aid when we make speeches. Wary of your determination to maintain procedures, I did not venture to do that today. The point I am trying to make is that this Bill, which was talked about as the Santa Claus Bill, is actually something that brings about a lot of goodwill and can be used, particularly in the run-up to Christmas, to help people do their shopping. Previously, the councils were unable to act quickly in response to situations. I will not labour that point any more.

My own local council in the main town of my constituency, Hinckley, just across the border from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, has many car parks, and, if this Bill achieves Third Reading today, it will certainly have an impact on the way that Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council implements parking in the future.

Hinckley has been very successful as a town centre. Recently, it was a finalist in the Great British High Street competition. Cost-effective parking is clearly important for a town that can achieve that success.

**Kevin Foster:** My hon. Friend is right to talk about the success of towns. Does he agree that that is why it is so important that we are absolutely clear that this Bill is about varying the charges down, and not up, which would inhibit the success of those towns?

**David Tredinnick:** I am glad that my hon. Friend has intervened. He represents Torbay, which is a very beautiful seaside town. In fact, years ago I knew his Conservative predecessor who was also passionately concerned about the town. He was known as Spy 13 because of his other job, which was writing spy novels. I wish him well if he is tuning into this debate.

May I say to my hon. Friend that he is doing absolutely the right thing for his constituency of Torbay where parking is clearly critical? I can assure him that if he looks at clause 1 he will see that this Bill is about enabling councils to reduce charges. It means that, in the future, they will not have to go to the expense of publishing notices in local newspapers to reduce charges, and it will give them a degree of flexibility, which is really important.

10.15 am

**Jo Churchill:** Is that not, in a nutshell, why we do not need to press this new clause? We are talking about flexibility and the fact that in Stowmarket councils can charge £1 for two hours, and that in Bury St Edmunds councils reduce their fees on a Tuesday afternoon. This is about local solutions to local issues to stimulate the high street.

**David Tredinnick:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, who has been a great champion not only on the matter of parking charges, but on the cause of cancer. I am very pleased to serve with her as an officer on the all-party cancer group.

For clarity, I will make it absolutely clear what these two clauses do. Clause 1 provides government with a power to make regulations that simplify the procedure

[David Tredinnick]

for lowering parking charges. At present, councils must give 21 days' notification in the press, and place signage in the car parks—something to which I have not yet referred—if they want to lower their charges. The private sector, however, can take a business decision to lower them without going through that process. This clause would simplify the requirement and give councils the flexibility to reduce their charges, thereby putting local authorities on an even footing with the private sector. My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay has not picked up on that point, but he might like to do so now. I am sure that he would have mentioned it had he thought of it.

**Kevin Foster:** To be fair, I do accept the very valid points that my hon. Friend makes. Private sector operators can literally change the signs overnight if they wish to change the prices in a car park, whereas a council has to go through very lengthy procedures. Does he agree with me, though, that, at the end of the day councils are meant to be bodies that are charged with delivering the public good in an area? A company or a corporation is, to put it bluntly, looking to make as much money as it can from the asset it owns.

**David Tredinnick:** My hon. Friend helpfully leads me into an area that I wish to discuss in a moment, which is the impact of pricing on car parking charges generally. Let me just make this further point to him and to the House: it is equally important that councils should consider the effect of increased parking charges on the high street. To that end, the clause makes provision for a consultation requirement so that councils take on board the views of local businesses and residents when they are looking to increase parking charges on an existing traffic order. They must already consult when a traffic order is set up, but it is proportionate to expect them to consult if they are raising charges during the life of the traffic order. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay that he should not fear that this Bill—the *de minimis* Bill, to quote my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch—will increase parking charges; it cannot do that.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones)**  
*rose—*

**David Tredinnick:** I will resist my hon. Friend the Minister, who looks as though he could spring to the Dispatch Box, because I know that he will make a speech later on.

**Mr Jones** *indicated assent.*

**David Tredinnick:** The Minister is nodding his head. I am sure he will reassure Members that I have not put anything in the Bill that allows local authorities to increase charges. I am simply saying that they need to ask people before they contemplate such a move, which they are already in a position to do.

**Wendy Morton:** The A5, which passes my hon. Friend's seat of Bosworth, is also the link through to my constituency, Aldridge-Brownhills, and to the Minister's

constituency, Nuneaton, so the three of us have something in common other than speaking on the Bill. On the point about consultation, does my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) agree that, for a resident, one of the most frustrating things is when they turn up in a town centre only to find that the car parking charges have gone up and they had no idea? That is why consultation is really important, because it is particularly frustrating for someone when they open their purse and find they do not have the right coins to put in the machine. I welcome the fact that the Bill emphasises consulting residents and listening to their views.

**David Tredinnick:** My hon. Friend knows how fast our area is developing. A huge business park is being developed at the Motor Industry Research Association, which is in my constituency and abuts that of my hon. Friend the Minister. He and I have been working over the years to improve the A5, and some major improvements are in the offing. It is, of course, a national road, and an important relief road when there are problems on the M6 and other roads. We will see an improvement in traffic movements generally, and if we are to have that, we need an improvement in how we manage the people who are moving around. When the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 was passed, nobody thought there would be the fluctuations in the patterns of shopping that we see now. We are in a whole new landscape. The world has speeded up—it is completely different since the advent of mobile phones, such as iPhones, and all the electronic media.

Together, clauses 1 and 2 offer a real opportunity for councils to take the views of their local communities into account, while giving them flexibilities where decreases to parking charges can better support the goal of having thriving town centres.

It is important that I mention the support I have received from various organisations. I had some very helpful briefing materials from an organisation that is engaged in and very concerned about parking. My hon. Friends should be aware that the value of UK retail sales in 2015 was £339 billion. That will provide jobs for 3.3 million employees by 2017 in approximately 287,000 outlets. Increasingly, though, the high street has been exposed to intense competition, including the rise of online shopping and increasing use of out-of-town retailers because of the ease with which consumers can use those options.

The point about online shopping is incredibly important. We have seen all the stories in the press about its impact on major stores and how difficult it is for them to fight back. As my hon. Friends from the midlands know, we have there these huge warehouses and distribution centres, particularly where the M1 and the M6 join, and there is also the M69. The middle of England is the ideal place for such centres. In fact, the geographical middle of England is in my constituency, and the Roman centre of England, where the Fosse Way crosses Watling Street, is just outside. That is really important.

Hon. Friends may want to expand on the important point that parking charges are a barrier to regeneration.

**Craig Whittaker:** On my hon. Friend's point about online retail, a 2011 report called "Re-Think! Parking on the High Street" highlighted the fact that small towns and villages were charging way above the UK

average for parking, putting them at a disadvantage. Does he agree it is important that town and borough councils have the flexibility to react very quickly in light of the threat from online retail?

**David Tredinnick:** I do agree. I shall discuss the impact the Bill will have throughout the country later in my speech, along with some other figures. First, I shall indulge my hon. Friend by referring to the Portas review, which showed clearly that car parking charges were the biggest barrier to the regeneration of our town centres. That is perhaps no surprise when we consider the fact that the average hourly parking rate in London is £8.44, which is 18% more than the minimum wage. That is a staggering figure.

The “Re-Think! Parking on the High Street” report clearly states that footfall does affect town centre performance, with those towns that have higher footfall generating a higher level of spend. If nothing is done, the high street will remain under threat from out-of-town and online retail facilities, where lack of, or expensive, parking is not an issue.

**Kevin Foster:** My hon. Friend just referred to London having extremely expensive parking charges, but it obviously still has thriving business centres around places such as Oxford Street. Does he agree that London’s economy operates very differently from the rest of the country? Anything like those charges in any other town would have devastated the shopping centres and high street businesses.

**David Tredinnick:** I accept that London is a special case and, of course, my hon. Friends and I do not represent London, but I thought it was instructive to make the point that the charges here are so high.

To follow up on the remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker), it is important to look at how the provisions will operate in practice. For greater accuracy, I asked the Commons Library to provide some figures on the scale of natural settlements—known as built-up areas to most of us—in the country. According to the 2011 census, we have in our country 56 cities, 696 towns with a population of 5,000 or more, and 1,590 villages with a population of between 1,000 and 5,000. Each one of those settlements could be affected by the Bill’s provisions. Pride is a dangerous word in parliamentary life—we can sometimes get too proud—but I am absolutely delighted to have been able to introduce a Bill that does not just affect a particular constituency matter but has a national impact. This Bill is going to have huge ramifications for business.

**Mr Marcus Jones** *indicated assent.*

**David Tredinnick:** I am very pleased to see my hon. Friend the Minister nodding.

**Wendy Morton:** On the broad point about business and regeneration—perhaps my hon. Friend will touch on this in his speech—by giving councils the flexibility to reduce their car parking charges when they deem it necessary for a specific event or whatever, the Bill can play a vital part in regeneration. Although councils would not get the income from car parking charges, not only would they not have to cover the costs associated

with advertising the reduction in charges, but they could get extra income from increasing the vibrancy of the high street, because the increased non-domestic rate collections would go back into the council.

**David Tredinnick:** My hon. Friend, ever eloquent, has struck a rich seam there. I am not going to mine it, but no doubt she can come back to that point.

For greater clarity, Mr Speaker, I should say that the statistics I just gave were for the cities, towns and villages in England.

**Mr Speaker:** Ah!

**David Tredinnick:** The Bill actually affects Wales, but it will not be implemented there and I do not have the statistics for Wales.

Something that has not been mentioned in any of the proceedings so far is what I call unusual events. I shall cite two exceptional events and suggest that the Bill might be useful in those circumstances. I have always been really happy to represent the constituency of Bosworth, which is where English history changed on 22 August 1485, when the last of the Yorkist Plantagenet line—

**The Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty’s Treasury (David Evennett):** King Richard.

**David Tredinnick:** Indeed; King Richard died in horrid circumstances, leaving Henry Tudor to be crowned Henry VII. In the run-up to the 2015 election, Richard’s mortal remains were discovered in a car park in Leicester. [HON. MEMBERS: “Ah!”] Interestingly, the exact position where he was found—my hon. Friends might like to hear this—was under a parking bay with an “R” on it, which one might say stood for “Reserved”, but it actually turned out to stand for “Rex”, Latin for king—Richard Rex, King of England.

10.30 am

Just before the 2015 general election, Richard’s mortal remains were taken back to Bosworth Field, where he was killed in action just over 500 years earlier. One of the judgments that the local police had to make was how to respond to an event that had received not just county coverage but country and worldwide coverage. The question was just how many people would turn up. I was invited to attend not only the proceedings at Bosworth Field and the point of the coffin’s departure but the events afterwards in Market Bosworth. I took the view that, even with a police escort and given the narrow lanes, there was no way that I could attend more than one event. I simply could not possibly get to them all. I arrived at the battlefield two hours early, because I had absolutely no idea how long it would take me to get there. In fact, we had a marquee, which was about six times the size of the Chamber, absolutely packed with journalists from all over the world. There were many thousands of people, and the roads were clogged.

The reason why it was an incredibly emotional experience—perhaps the most emotional that I have ever had as a Member of Parliament—to see the coffin arrive was that the field was in dead silence. And a very special day it was, but the point is that if the Bill is enacted—if it gets its Third Reading, goes to the other place and comes back approved and becomes law—a council in such a situation might want at a stroke to

change its parking regulations on the day. Its charges might be quite ridiculous and it might need to process people quickly, so the Bill will help there.

The other event that I want to refer to involved completely the opposite situation for traffic: the solar eclipse that took place on 11 August 1999.

**Kevin Foster:** Does my hon. Friend agree that if special events are about communities coming together and bringing in a surge of trade and that if local authorities view them as an opportunity, bluntly, to turn their car parks into a bit of a cash cow and rip people off, we could see an effect similar to what happened with the solar eclipse in 1999 in Cornwall: where places increased prices, people just did not come?

**David Tredinnick:** I have a good recollection of those events, and the Bill is not about raising charges; it is about lowering charges and raising consultation levels. That is the soundbite; that is what the Bill is all about. That is why I ask my hon. Friend to withdraw his new clause.

My hon. Friend talks about private car park owners who wanted to ratchet up charges in Cornwall. My hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), who is not here today, has had her own issues with car parking. My hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland), who also is not here, has had such issues and held a successful debate on them in Westminster Hall the other day. There was so much in the newspapers and so much media hype about what would happen and the pandemonium that would be caused by the huge number of people who would go to Cornwall to watch the eclipse, which totally blocked out the light of the sun for about a minute, that nobody actually turned up. As my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay will recall, the numbers were way down and quite the reverse of what was expected happened. Councils might therefore make provision to reduce charges, but then suddenly realise that there is no need to do so at all, rather than waiting for 21 days and losing revenue. In that situation, the opposite applied.

I shall conclude my remarks fairly soon, but I want first to refer to what the Federation of Small Businesses told me yesterday. Apart from generously congratulating me on negotiating the narrows of the rivers to get to this point with a private Member's Bill, it says that it is wholly supportive of the measures in the Bill, that it will be an additional tool for the Government to support local small businesses and ensure that they and their customers can park, and that is why it is very welcome. The FSB's research shows that seven in 10 small firms think that parking is a priority for the future of independent shops. It says that independent retailers in town centres are the engines that help to make the UK's local communities what they are. In its report, "Going the extra mile", it found that small businesses are overwhelmingly reliant on roads, with nine in 10 firms—about 89%—placing a high value on the network. With so many small businesses relying on the road network, it argues for greater investment. Well, that is predictable. Its final point is that consultation with businesses is required before local authorities increase the cost of parking. That is exactly what clause 2 will provide.

**Jo Churchill:** Does my hon. Friend agree that this is particularly pertinent in rural communities and small market towns, where a lot of the trade has to come in

from villages and so on, and that we need to aim for accessibility and the ability to control prices to facilitate businesses, which we want to survive because there is nothing sadder than a dying high street?

**David Tredinnick:** One is always looking for help in this place, and my hon. Friend almost makes my closing remarks for me. We are talking about a simple three-clause Bill that has been reported by a Committee without amendment, that seeks to allow councils to reduce parking charges without consultation but that insists on consultation if they want to increase charges.

Before I sit down, I should like to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay that he has proposed a helpful new clause. He clearly feels passionately about the issue, as it impacts his town, and he is right to come to the Chamber and get us to scrutinise it in some detail, but I hope that I have been able to give him the reassurance that he requires. I look to my hon. Friend the Minister to flesh out any points that I have not made and give the Government's approval. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay and will resume my seat.

**Mr Marcus Jones:** I welcome the opportunity to comment on the new clause and the important points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster). My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), who is my constituency neighbour, has already set out in significant detail his views on the new clause. Although the intentions expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay are good, as they generally are, and in the best interests of constituents, my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth was right to speak against the new clause. I shall set out the Government's view on why we do not think that agreeing to it is a good idea.

The Bill will create the power to make regulations to simplify the procedures local authorities must follow if they want to lower their parking charges. It will introduce a consultation requirement if local authorities want to increase parking charges. Parking provision plays an important role in allowing people to access high streets and town centres. Town centres continue to play an essential role in the lives of communities, and parking charges can be an important factor when people choose which ones to visit. As some out-of-town shopping malls provide free parking, councils need to think carefully about the level and range of parking available. Parking charges will no doubt play an important role in people's choices. The Government are committed to promoting town centres and high streets as thriving places at the heart of communities.

I strongly believe that it is right and proper for local authorities to consult their local communities and town centre businesses when proposing to increase charges. I stress that this is not about the Government trying to dictate to local authorities how to conduct their parking policies. We are asking councils, in a localist way, to take into account the views of local communities before increasing charges. I have a good example from my constituency. The local district council has not listened to the views of local people and has increased car parking charges. As a result, its car parking income has dropped by £350,000. That shows why it is important to consult local people and listen carefully to what they say because the views of local people and business owners are quite

often the views of the very people who use and depend on those car parks for their livelihoods.

**Kevin Foster:** It is disappointing to hear that Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council does not have the sort of pro-business and pro-growth leadership that it had between 2008 and 2010. Will the Minister reassure me that if this Bill becomes law, the Government will not make it easier to increase parking charges without consultation, and that the measures are purely about making it easier to vary charges downwards so that authorities do not have consultations asking people, “Do you want to pay less?”?

**Mr Jones:** I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. I reassure him that, following the implementation of the Bill, a council—whether in Torbay, Nuneaton or elsewhere—would certainly have to consult local people before taking the decision to increase charges.

I also reassure my hon. Friend that the provisions will not be implemented on the day the Bill receives Royal Assent. We want to ensure that there is some balance, and that the powers created are practical and proportionate. To ensure that the measures work in practice, we will consult local authorities, the Local Government Association, the British Parking Association and other interested organisations to ensure that their important views are taken into account before the regulations are made and laid. Furthermore, parliamentary colleagues will have an opportunity to consider any regulations in the normal procedures for secondary legislation. My Department will undertake a new burdens assessment to establish the administrative effect on local authorities of the duty to consult. The Bill will strengthen local democracy by giving people and businesses a voice in decisions on car parking charges that have an impact on the vitality of a town centre.

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): On that point, is this the most practical way for consulting local business, particularly when a town has a business improvement district? Halesowen, part of which I represent, is going through the process of becoming a business improvement district. Does the Minister agree that that would be an appropriate forum for local businesses to express their views about parking charges and the impact on town centres?

**Mr Jones:** As ever, my hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. I am glad to hear about the business improvement district in Halesowen. I am glad to say that businesses in my constituency of Nuneaton are trying to do the same thing. Business improvement districts are excellent vehicles for local businesses to be able to express their views on such issues. The local authority, taking into account the measures in the Bill, will be able to use those forums as important consultees before increasing car parking charges.

10.45 am

**Wendy Morton:** I welcome the news that the Minister’s Department will be consulting on the matter of consultation and seeking views, and I understand that that may take a little time. Is he able at this stage to give us any indication as to the timescale for the other part of the Bill—the ability to lower car parking charges? Will that measure be in place before Christmas, given that it has been called the Santa Claus Bill?

**Mr Jones:** We have heard a great deal about Santa. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth bought the Santa decoration that he came across in the House of Commons shop. Perhaps he did on the basis that, once this Santa Claus Bill passes through the House, he will be able to put it on his tree next year; he said that he did not want to tempt fate by doing so this year. I hope that we are not tempting fate today. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) makes a good point. It is certainly our intention to ensure that the measures for reducing parking charges can be brought forward to enable the situation she mentions.

**Craig Whittaker:** Although I appreciate that there has been much talk about town centre car parking, does the Minister agree that one of the biggest areas of contention for residents and local people—the Bill will, without question, help with this—is around our local hospitals, where there are huge parking problems? The facility to allow a consultation with local people will ensure that we get some good results and some proper strategies.

**Mr Jones:** Consultation is always important. The two issues are interlinked. Many hospitals are situated in and around town centres, and that can cause all sorts of pressures. The measures in the Bill would have a beneficial effect if the local authorities used them positively. If authorities decide to lower charges, the number of people using local authority car parks may increase, which would then take pressure off other car parks.

Many residents live around town centres. If parking charges are not proportionate, people quite often park in the streets around a town centre and avoid using the car parks because it is quite easy to walk into the centre of town. That exacerbates problems for many people living in such areas. By definition, a town centre is a historic place so properties around it usually date from quite a while back—the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century—when nobody had a car. Those streets were not built for cars, so there is a lot of competition for parking among the residents alone. The last thing they want are councils that hike up parking charges without consultation, which would put more pressure on their streets and the parking arrangements in them. It is an important part of the Bill that we put in place a situation whereby councils consult.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** Will the Minister confirm that the regulations will also cover coach parking? Coach parking charges were introduced in one of my market towns, Helmsley. That reduced the number of tourist coaches coming to the town, which is a renowned market town and a tourist destination. We then ran a campaign, and the local authority decided to remove the charges, which has helped tremendously to attract new visitors to the town. I would be interested to hear the Minister’s thoughts on whether coach parking charges are also covered.

**Mr Jones:** As I was sitting down, I glanced up and noticed that I have cleared the Public Gallery, which is an achievement in itself.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Not for the first time.

**Mr Jones:** It is always good to be part of the legislative process when the hon. Gentleman is on the Opposition Front Bench.

Helmsley is an interesting example. It was the winner of the 2015 Great British High Street competition—a competition I thought at the time would put paid to my ministerial career. Helmsley was in the final with Chipping Norton, which was in the constituency of the former Prime Minister, David Cameron. When Helmsley beat Chipping Norton in the final, I thought my life would not be worth living, but I am glad to say the former Prime Minister did not hold it against me.

Helmsley is an important example because it has a significant number of visitors, and provision has to be put in place for coaches and buses to park. Buses parked in a bus station is possibly a different situation, and I will probably have to come back to my hon. Friend about it. However, many events happen in places such as Helmsley, and local traders might be very heartened if the local authority used the Bill's provisions to reduce its car parking charges.

In conclusion, good communication between local authorities and the public is absolutely vital for a healthy democracy. That extends to local authorities being clear about their decision-making process. That means the public knowing why decisions are taken. Such decisions affect individuals and their communities and—this is not overstating the matter—can have a profound effect on the lives and jobs of many, many people.

**Kevin Foster:** I thank the Minister, and particularly the Member in charge of the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), for their comments in response to the new clause. As I said, I moved it to be clear about the purpose of the Bill and what procedures will be created under it in relation to local authorities and what they can do.

I fully accept that it is right that there is flexibility, and the full drive of the Bill is to make it easier to vary parking charges downwards. Therefore, having heard the extensive reassurances provided by the Member in charge, which were particularly persuasive—he succeeded in his goal—and the reassurances from the Minister, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

*Clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

*Third Reading*

10.55 am

**David Tredinnick:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Third time.

It is a special moment for me to bring a Bill to Third Reading in the House of Commons. I had three criteria for my private Member's Bill. First, I wanted it to be sufficiently uncontroversial to pass through all stages in the two Houses of Parliament. I have sat through seven Parliaments in this House and seen many Bills bite the dust on a Friday, and I did not want to join that club. That is why I kept the Bill to two clauses.

Secondly, I wanted to have a national impact. In selecting a Bill, I did not want something that was parochial; I wanted something that would make a difference across the country. Thirdly, I wanted something that would improve the lives of our constituents. To use the old-fashioned language, our duty is to improve the

condition of the people—that is what they used to say in the 19th century. The modern translation is that our job is to make people's lives better—that is why we are sent here.

If I am called a second time, I might offer a few words of thanks, but at this point I will just say how delighted I am that colleagues have allowed this Bill to reach its Third Reading.

10.57 am

**Andy Slaughter:** It is a pleasure to be here for the Opposition to respond to the Bill. I wish the hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) success with it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) said on Second Reading, it has our support. Although it is modest in size, I am sure it will do what the hon. Gentleman says and bring pleasure around the country.

It is also a pleasure to be opposite the Minister for the second week running, but I would just say this to the promoter of the Bill: check the new burdens money, and make sure it is all there at the appropriate time. Having said that, I do not—unlike last week, when we spent five hours on the concluding stages of the Homelessness Reduction Bill—want to prolong the debate.

I will just make two short observations. When the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) was making his interesting and somewhat lengthy interventions earlier, he said two things that I mildly disagreed with and that the Minister may wish to comment on. One was that local authorities can fill their boots with parking charges and use the money for whatever they like. The facility to charge money under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 was tested in the case of Attfield and Barnet, and the conclusion of the learned judge, Mrs Justice Lang, was that

“the 1984 Act is not a fiscal measure and does not authorise the authority to use its powers to charge local residents for parking in order to raise surplus revenue for other transport purposes funded by the General Fund.”

So although there are a variety of things connected to parking and other road traffic and transport matters that local authorities can use the funds for, I do not think that parking charges can simply be used as a revenue-raising measure.

**Mr Marcus Jones:** Let me just try to help the hon. Gentleman and bring a little clarity. He is right in what he says about on-street ticket revenue, but there are currently no restrictions on how ticket revenue from off-street car parking is spent by a local authority.

**Andy Slaughter:** I am grateful to the Minister. I was interested to see that the Bill deals with both on-street and off-street parking.

The hon. Member for Torbay said that he cannot envisage circumstances in which he would get letters from people asking for parking charges to go up. That may well be true as regards council-owned car parks and off-street parking, but it is often the case with on-street parking that is shared between residents and non-residents who wish to park there and pay and display, when charging is for the purposes of regulating access between residents and users of the visitors' scheme, and residents ask for parking enforcement and for

certain levels of charging. I do not think that that goes to the heart of this Bill. I understand that its intention is to give flexibility to local authorities and to encourage them more towards lowering than raising charges. I do not think any of us are going to disagree with that. I make these points merely because these matters are often fraught for councils and for Members of Parliament. I hope that, on the whole, councils try to do a decent job in pleasing everybody. If they do not, they tend to get voted out.

Having made those rather pettifogging remarks, I will not prolong my comments. The promoter of the Bill said that he wants it to make life better for people around the country, and I am sure that it will do that. I am also aware that slightly further down the list of private Members' Bills—until this Bill and the next Bill came out of Committee, it would have been the first to be discussed—is the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on reducing child poverty. If I may humbly say so, from my own perspective as a Member with a great deal of child poverty in my constituency, I wish that we could get on to that Bill and give it a Second Reading, because that would make life even better for our constituents around the country.

11.1 am

**Craig Whittaker:** I am extremely pleased to be able to contribute to this debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) for bringing his private Member's Bill to this House for what is now its Third Reading.

The Bill seeks to make provision for the procedure to be followed by local authorities when varying the charges to be paid for off-street parking and parking on designated highways. It amends provisions within the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. In order to consider the merits of the Bill, it is initially necessary to consider the existing powers that local authorities have with regard to parking, and how they differ from the existing regulation. Sections 41 and 42 of the Road Traffic Act 1991 awarded new powers to local authorities to vary car parking charges at designated on-street parking places and in off-street car parks. The discussions on the provisions that would become the 1991 Act were fairly limited, and the only debate came on Report in the Lords, when the then Government introduced a new clause on off-street car parks. The then Transport Minister, Lord Brabazon of Tara, said that the provision

“applies to variation of charges at off-street parking places. Local authorities making orders prescribing charges at off-street parking places will, in future, be able to vary those charges subsequently by the simpler public notice procedure—to be prescribed by 978 regulations made by the Secretary of State and subject to the negative resolution procedure—instead of having to make a new parking places order.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 10 June 1991; Vol. 529, c. 977.]

The powers that were provided through the 1991 Act are contained in sections 35C and 46A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended. The current procedures regarding the ability of local authorities to amend parking charges are stipulated also through regulation 25 of the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedures) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996—specifically, SI 1996/2489. When seeking either to increase or decrease charges, these regulations require local

authorities to do following. First, they have to publish a notice of variation at least once in a newspaper that circulates within the area where the charges are to be altered at least 21 days before the proposed changes are due to come into effect. The relevant notice must also specify the date when it is due to come into force. It must stipulate which parking places the notice relates to, and outline the alterations to the charges that will take effect for each parking place. Finally, the local authority must take steps to ensure that copies of the notice are displayed in the affected areas and that these remain in a legible condition until the date when the changes come into effect.

Through amending the existing powers of the Secretary of State at sections 35C and 46A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the Bill revisits the current regulations and seeks to reduce the bureaucratic burden placed on local authorities that are seeking to reduce their parking charges. Furthermore, the Bill allows for a new condition that means that local authorities will need to consult if they are looking to increase their parking charges under an existing traffic order. The intention behind the Bill is fairly clear. It seeks to give councils more flexibility to innovate with regard to the parking strategies and to make it easier for them to reduce car parking charges in order to react to particular circumstances or events, many of which we have already heard about today.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth rightly pointed out, parking policies have the potential to enhance the economic viability of our high streets, and the benefits to town centres and communities who strike the correct balance with regard to parking charges can be considerable. Before entering this House, I worked in the retail industry for 30 years, during which time I witnessed at first hand the impact that parking strategies can have on the high street. The independent retailers, traders and small businesses that are the lifeblood of our town centres rely on a balanced parking policy that promotes the regular turnover of parking spaces, manages traffic flow successfully, and ensures that the level of charges is reasonable and proportionate in relation to the retail offer that is available to consumers. My own local authority, Calderdale, has sought to introduce a range of additional charges over recent years, and has miserably failed to strike such a balance—a point I will return to shortly.

Before I do so, it is worth exploring the link between town centre prosperity and car parking provision in more detail. Of course, a plethora of different factors influences the comparative success of a town centre. It is therefore incredibly difficult to evidence a clear link between parking policies and the success of town centres. In 2013, a number of organisations, including the Association of Town and City Management, the British Parking Association, Springboard Research Ltd and Parking Data and Research International collaboratively produced a report entitled, “Re-Think! Parking on the High Street: Guidance on Parking Provision in Town and City Centres.” The report explored what evidence could be collated and what could be learned about the relationship between car parking provision and town centre success. Through analysing a range of data using a representative sample of town centres and considering primary indicators—that is, the factors that are judged to have the largest impact on the health of a town centre—the report provides some preliminary evidence

[Craig Whittaker]

that suggests important trends and provides a solid foundation for more comprehensive research.

Due to the wide range of variable factors at play, the report was tightly drawn to focus on a number of specific influences. For example, instead of considering all durations of parking, the report expressly focuses on the first two hours. It was felt that by doing so, it would cover those who had parked to go shopping and eliminate other parking habits—such as commuter parking—from the data. The variables considered included the cost of parking and the quality of spaces. Of the many indicators of town centre performance, the report measured the two key statistics of footfall and spend. Finally, the towns included were carefully selected to provide a representative sample of the town centre landscape across the UK. The report included towns in each region, spanning the entire retail hierarchy from major city to district centre level.

Because of the precise methodology and the fact that the variables chosen reflected only part of this wide and complex picture, we must naturally be cautious about the report's findings. However, it does suggest some interesting trends. First, parking operators are making available parking provision that equates to the levels of footfall in the location. Secondly, there is no clear relationship between the car parking charges set by owners or operators and the quality of a location's offer. Some mid-range and smaller town centres may be overcharging. Finally, the mid-range and smaller centres that charge more than the national average in relation to their offer suffered a higher-than-average decline in footfall in 2011, the year in which the data were collected.

Although we must acknowledge that the report does not constitute conclusive evidence that the cost of parking has a tangible influence on town centre prosperity, it opens up an avenue for further research and conforms to the anecdotal or common-sense opinion about the likelihood of such a link. Although the report's suggestion that town centres with higher-than-average parking costs experienced an average decline in footfall in 2011 will hardly come as a surprise, further research is required before it can be categorically stated that any such link exists. Furthermore, the scale of the detrimental impact that higher costs may have on high streets and consumer habits is unknown and requires further investigation. Each town centre is unique and exposed to widely differing external factors, so something that is true in one context may not be true in another, but the initial trend suggested by the report should act as a wake-up call for local authorities.

That point leads me on to the record of my local authority, Calderdale Council, which has a rather chequered history when it comes to parking charges. On Second Reading a few months ago, I challenged the notion that local authorities do not use car parking charges to generate additional revenue. Although I cannot comment on the choices that other local authorities have made in the last few years, I can say a few words about Calderdale's unflattering record in that regard.

In 2012, the cabinet of Calderdale Council approved a raft of additional car parking charges. The title of the cabinet committee paper was "The Parking Income

Generation Study". [HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful!"] Indeed. The first line of the report made explicitly clear the council's intention to

"generate additional revenue from parking."

The proposals included a wide range of additional charges in areas in which parking had previously been free, with the aim of generating an additional £841,000 per annum. Although some of the measures outlined in the report were a genuine attempt to manage existing parking and traffic difficulties, including long-standing problems around Calderdale Royal hospital, many related to areas in which there were no identifiable problems with parking or traffic management. Such measures included the introduction of evening parking charges in previously free car parks in small market towns in my constituency, such as Brighouse, Todmorden, Ripponden and West Vale.

As Members know, local authorities are permitted to spend parking income only on certain things. The relevant legislation is section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, which states:

"A local authority shall keep an account of their income and expenditure in respect of parking places for which they are the local authority".

Subsections (4) and (5), which set out what a surplus may be spent on, are particularly relevant. If a council has used money from the general fund to plug a deficit in parking operations, a surplus may be used to pay back that money. It may be spent on meeting all or part of the cost of the provision and maintenance by the local authority of off-street parking accommodation.

If a local authority believes that the provision of further off-street parking accommodation is unnecessary or undesirable, a surplus may be used for the following purposes: to meet costs incurred, whether by the local authority or by some other person, in the provision of public transport services; for highway or road improvement projects in the area; to meet the costs incurred by a London authority in the maintenance of roads; for environmental improvement in the local authority area; or, in the case of such local authorities as may be prescribed, for any other purposes for which the authority may lawfully incur expenditure around parking.

Of course, some of the charges implemented by local authorities fit more comfortably than others within the remit of section 55 of the 1984 Act. In the examples from my local authority that I gave few moments ago, it could be argued that although the measures to address parking problems around a busy hospital fall within both the letter and the spirit of the law, the proposals for cashing in on the lucrative market of evening parking charges in a busy town centre are more questionable and rather difficult to justify.

Local authorities such as Calderdale, will, I suspect, continue to try to defend their parking charge increases, however tenuous the link with the legislative guidelines and any genuine desire to improve the traffic management and parking situation in their area. The judgement in 2013 in the case of *Attfield v. London Borough of Barnet*, which the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) has mentioned, clarified the position of local authorities that seek to use their powers to charge local residents for parking explicitly to raise surplus revenue for other transport purposes funded by the general fund. Mrs Justice Lang said that a council

could not set out with the objective of raising parking charges in order to generate a surplus to fund other transport schemes.

David Attfield, who brought the case against Barnet, admitted that he was able to win the case because the council was open about the fact that it was increasing charges to provide additional revenue. Calderdale Council's cabinet committee paper, to which I alluded earlier, was equally explicit about the overt intention to raise charges to provide additional revenue. I suspect that had the proposal been formally challenged in the courts, an outcome similar to the verdict in *Attfield v. Barnet* would have been reached. Residents and community groups, not to mention opposition councillors on local authorities across the country, may wish to pay particular attention to the ways in which local authorities attempt to justify such increases in the future, because I am sure that Barnet Council is not unique in seeking to use motorists as cash cows.

In the absence of further legal challenges to local authority practices, it is up to residents and councillors to hold local politicians to account. The additional charges approved in Calderdale in 2012 formally took effect in 2014. Within months, the discontent of local residents and businesses adversely affected by the charges prompted opposition councillors to trigger a vote of no confidence in the ruling Labour council administration. The vote was carried, and within weeks of the new parking meters being installed, they were removed again on the orders of the new Conservative-led administration; that was just one example of local democracy in action. However, such is the finely balanced political landscape of Calderdale Council that, just a few years later, the same Labour cabinet is again in control and seeking to reimpose many of the same additional parking charges.

The latest proposals for additional charges hit several towns in my constituency, including Brighouse, where the local business group, the Brighouse Business Initiative, has worked incredibly hard to reinvigorate the town centre and to increase footfall. The efforts of Brighouse traders have seen the town centre flourish, and several farmers markets are run every year that bring people in from across the country.

To the dismay of traders, residents and local councillors, the council seek to impose on-street parking charges in the town centre, despite wide acknowledgement that there are currently no problems with the flow of traffic, nor with the turnover of parking spaces for consumers. Saying that the local business community is furious would be an understatement. Traders are rightly concerned about the damaging effect that the proposals could have on their businesses and livelihoods. Despite making their feelings known to the council, local Labour politicians seem content to proceed with their plans regardless of the scale of any opposition.

The Bill provides for local authorities to consult interested parties if they are seeking to increase the cost of parking charges to ensure that the impacts on towns are fully considered. That can only be a positive step forward. Local businesses, residents and councillors understand their town centres and communities. They are able to recognise which measures will work and how their local high-street economy can be properly managed. It is only right that they are consulted on any potential

increases in charges and that detailed consideration is given to the impacts of such proposals on their town centres.

I appreciate that many local authorities already engage in thorough consultation with their communities on such issues, and I applaud them for doing so. However, I assure Members that that does not happen everywhere, so I wholeheartedly welcome the provisions in the Bill to ensure that local communities are involved in the decision-making process. I am sure that local communities such as Brighouse will strongly welcome the measure and the opportunities that it presents to them to ensure that their views are considered.

On Second Reading, the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), raised questions about how the consultation process might work. He was entirely correct to say that further detail on the consultation process is required, and I trust that the Minister will elaborate on that point later.

As well as making provision for consulting local communities, the Bill seeks to make it quicker and easier for local authorities to lower their parking charges to promote the economic viability of town centres. Specifically, it provides for a reduction in charges without the need for the current 21 days' notice. That reform will provide local authorities with the flexibility to react more quickly to changes and with the ability to innovate in providing additional support to town centres.

Many market towns in my constituency, such as Todmorden, Hebden Bridge and Elland, are still getting back on their feet following the devastating floods on Boxing day in 2015. I note that despite the flooding, Hebden Bridge won the small market town category of the Great British High Street awards last year, so well done to the town. However, many businesses the towns struggled in the months immediately after the floods when footfall on the high street was significantly reduced. The proposals would have allowed the local authority the flexibility of deciding quickly how car-parking charges in those towns could have been used as a tool to support local businesses. That could have involved free parking on certain days or a limited reduction in charges.

**Wendy Morton:** To pick up the point about flexibility and a local authority being able to reduce car-parking charges in response to a situation such as the flooding, does my hon. Friend agree that another advantage of doing so would be for volunteers who come from outside the communities to help them through a very difficult patch? One of my local councillors had a collection of materials to help in that situation. He went up there, and it would have been a great gesture for the council to be able to make.

**Craig Whittaker:** A massive point about the floods was the great outpouring of support for our communities from the whole of the UK—we had not tens, dozens or hundreds of volunteers, but thousands and thousands of people coming to the Calder Valley, as no doubt other areas did as well. People came from Cornwall and even from overseas to help. There were firemen and other people bringing food, mops, buckets and cleaning materials. People were out helping, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right that giving something back to them—for example, free car parking—would have been a gesture,

[Craig Whittaker]

though an incredibly small one compared with the huge support they gave us as communities at that awful time.

As I was saying, ideas such as parking on certain days or a limited reduction in charges could have been considered and implemented with minimal fuss under the powers awarded to local authorities through the Bill. Such measures would have provided traders in the towns with a real boost at the very time they were struggling to attract football—excuse me, footfall; we do not particularly want football, because we do not have a football pitch—back to the high street and to get back on their feet.

It is now over 12 months since flooding hit the Calder Valley, and the effects are still being felt by many businesses. Elland bridge, which is one of the main gateways to the town centre of Elland, was destroyed by the floods and remains closed to traffic, in effect cutting Elland in half, which is similar to what we have seen in such places as Tadcaster. Traders and small businesses in Elland have struggled with significantly lower levels of footfall over the past year, not least as a consequence of the closure of the bridge. Under the Bill the local authority could have sought to introduce an imaginative strategy to bring people to the town. This would have provided a huge lift to the traders and the community, and it would have been a clear signal that the town was open for business.

It is absolutely vital that councils have the flexibility to reduce or suspend charges at short notice to stimulate the high street. That may be done in relation to exceptional circumstances such as those that I alluded to, or it might be done to support a community event or festival—for example, charges could be reduced in the run-up to Christmas. Furthermore, the provisions would allow councils to experiment and innovate. In many towns there is a significant difference between the levels of occupation in different car parks and on-street parking bays in the same locality. The Bill would allow councils to develop temporary incentives to increase the awareness of under-utilised assets and to see which parking strategies best suit particular areas in a town.

Requiring 21 days' notice and the announcement to be published in a local newspaper and posted in the appropriate area is both overly bureaucratic and totally unnecessary in this day and age. When the council is competing with the private sector, as it is in many areas, this puts them at a significant competitive disadvantage, as private firms can currently vary charges as they see fit.

**Kevin Foster:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it could be right to have some restrictions to make things slightly more difficult for councils? That might help to deal with the sort of rapacious behaviour he described from his council when the Labour party is in charge of it.

**Craig Whittaker:** My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. I referred earlier to having spent 30 years in retail, and I know that when there is a proper parking strategy in place, it benefits everybody. I remember that when I was a general manager for Wilkinson home and garden stores in its development store in Bury in Lancashire—I hope that will not be held against me, as I represent Yorkshire—the council put a proper strategy in place at the car park next to Wilkinson's, and our business

increased by 15%, which was a significant uplift. My hon. Friend is right that by getting the strategy right and ensuring that we have a proper open and honest debate about what can benefit all parts of a town, whether the high street or the area around a hospital, we can make a huge and vital difference not just to businesses but to residents and people coming into the town.

**Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab):** It seems to me that the hon. Gentleman is being more than a bit partisan. Is he aware that it is often Conservative-controlled councils that make the most money from parking? I have just looked at *The Independent* from December 2015, which said that Westminster council had made an astonishing £46.4 million that year.

**Craig Whittaker:** I think I said earlier that it is welcome when councils do things well, but sadly there are far too many that do not. My experience is of a Labour-controlled council in Calderdale, which has openly admitted that it uses parking as a cash cow, as did Barnet Council, which was taken to court. I was not being particularly partisan; I was merely pointing out that Calderdale is a Labour-controlled council that has been open and honest enough to say that it has used parking as a cash cow.

**Kevin Foster:** My hon. Friend will recall that I intervened on the Bill's promoter, my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), on Report earlier today, saying that trying to compare central London with the rest of the country is patently ridiculous. The reason why Westminster council makes a lot of money out of parking is that it is in the very centre of London.

**Craig Whittaker:** As always, my hon. Friend makes a valid point. The strategies that councils have in place in the centre of London, Manchester, Birmingham or Leeds will be entirely different from those in some of my smaller local villages, such as West Vale, Ripponden, Hebden Bridge, Todmorden and Brighouse.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** My hon. Friend's experiences contrast with mine of my local Conservative council, Hambleton—this is not a political point, but it reflects a pro-business culture in that council. One of our market towns, Thirsk, has introduced a scheme whereby the first hour is free in the market square car park. That has increased the turnover of shoppers and parkers, which he mentioned at the beginning of his speech.

**Craig Whittaker:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point. For a retailer, it is vital that a local resident can pop down to the town centre to get a pint of milk or a loaf of bread—the essentials that we need for daily living—with absolute ease. An excellent car parking strategy would allow them do that as easily and quickly as possible.

High streets and town centres continue to play a fundamental role in the lives of our communities, and parking is one of the factors most able to shape their success. If local authorities can strike the correct balance, a successful parking strategy can bring in visitors. I mentioned the Brighouse Business Initiative, which runs farmers markets in our area. Every year, it runs a massive 1940s weekend, which brings in about 200,000 additional

people. Such initiatives in town centres can bring in the footfall, and car parking plays a vital role in that. It can help to reinvigorate a town centre.

Sadly, if the local council gets it wrong, a town centre can experience an all too different result. When local authorities seek to support the high street by reducing charges, the Bill will facilitate that and give them the flexibility to do so. If they adopt a different approach and seek to raise charges, it will ensure that local people and businesses are properly consulted and that the impact on the town is fully considered before any changes are made. The Bill has the potential to have a lasting and positive impact on our town centres, and I wholeheartedly support the intention behind it. I welcome the fact that both the Government and the Opposition have suggested that they will support it, and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth for bringing it before the House.

My final point is a message to the Minister. He might have a great knack of emptying the Public Gallery, but if he looks up he will see that it is now almost full.

11.35 am

**Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) on achieving his goal of a measure that is incredibly simple but makes a lot of common sense. The importance of the Bill should not be underestimated, though. Over the past five years, Derby City Council has made about £20 million from parking charges and fines, but instead of that money just being focused on parking, the Bill will enable us to consider what we should be doing with it for the city and its regeneration, so that we can make it easier for people to come in and use our city wisely.

The aim behind the Bill, rightly, is to provide flexibility. Trying to get people coming into our cities more often is particularly important. The Great British High Street awards have been mentioned, and the cathedral quarter in Derby won the high street of the year award last year. We are very proud of that. The way we did that is not to be underestimated, because we had the challenge of a new centre that had been built 10 years ago, offering parking and shopping in one place, which had taken business away from other parts of the city. Now, we are working on regenerating two other parts of the city, and parking plays a significant part in that. I want to encourage flexibility for councils so that they can have cheaper parking in certain areas one Saturday a month, for instance, or free parking at night or for an hour in the morning, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) mentioned. The Bill provides a great opportunity for such things to be considered.

The work of the business improvement district in Derby, which I have spoken about before, should not be underestimated. It has the challenge of getting people who would normally prefer convenience shopping to take advantage of places outside the shopping centre. One way in which it can do that is by providing reasonable and convenient parking. People will then think of those areas as somewhere for destination shopping, where they can park readily in the knowledge that the cost will be reasonable, get out of their car and do their shopping. We can help small businesses by doing that and encourage

a two-centre shopping experience rather than the one-centre experience that seemed dominant at one point.

In Derby, we take great advantage of the use of events. For instance, we have the Derby Festé, which is really well attended, with people performing in the streets, and Christmas markets and farmers markets. With those events, we are trying to regenerate an area of Derby for people to enjoy and seek entertainment. Clearly, these events need a parking offer to make attendance more attractive. Otherwise, people tend to park at the shopping centre and then not leave to visit other places for their entertainment. The Bill is a great opportunity to respond to local need.

We must encourage people to walk between destinations. The cheaper offer at shopping centres means that people tend to park and then stay there. With a cheaper offer outside the centres, say in the cathedral quarter or St Peters quarter, people might park there and then explore other parts of our great city, including the Market Hall, where they can experience the delights of the Derby pyclet, which I can recommend to hon. Members. For those who do not know—*[Interruption.]* Yes, it's a flattened crumpet.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker), I was in retail for over 30 years. The value of retail to our economy is not to be underestimated. The Federation of Small Businesses has highlighted that parking charges are one of the main factors discouraging shoppers from visiting traditional high streets. It is important that we regenerate our traditional high streets, including the independent retailers, and get people using them again, and variable parking charges could definitely encourage that.

As mentioned, there is an issue with online shopping. We have to make it as easy and attractive as possible for people to visit our high streets and cities, instead of shopping online and having the items delivered to their door. Derby—like many other city centres, I suspect—is trying to boost not just its daytime economy but its night-time economy. It would be lovely to see people walking along our high streets, taking in some café culture, and enjoying the richness of our cathedral city.

During my time as an MP, I have taken part in small business Saturday each year and done short shifts in some of our local shops. We must do everything we can to get people into these shops. If they can park easily, we can get them through the doors, and then they will see the unique and interesting offer.

**Jo Churchill:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the small independent trader adds to the richness of our high streets, which is what small business Saturday is all about? In these shops, one often finds an offer not necessarily found on the internet and also gets that personal service, which is worth having. We must encourage anything that can be used as leverage to attract people into our towns or cities.

**Amanda Solloway:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. As I mentioned, Derby has just won the Great British High Street award, partly because of the unique offer in places such as Sadler Gate, in the cathedral quarter, where a group of designers have got together to offer goods, all individually designed, and are taking it in turn to sell those products in their shop. It is very

[*Amanda Solloway*]

innovative and inspirational and draws people in because it is not something found in the shopping centre. That is good way forward.

The private sector has an important part to play.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** On the private sector, it is important that local authorities consult the private sector, yet in York, where I first located the head office of our business, the council sold off lots of car parks and then raised the charges in the remaining ones. That destroyed a lot of the independent retailers in the city because, at the same time, it was giving consent for out-of-town shopping centres, of which there are four around York, and then benefited from the huge section 106 contributions flowing back into its coffers. It is anti-business in terms of the important independent retailers in our town and city centres.

**Amanda Solloway:** I agree absolutely. Having been not only in retail for over 30 years, but an avid shopper for over 30 years, I have often visited York, and it is a shame. Shopping centres have their place, but we need to work in partnership to ensure two offers. As I mentioned, these two things are very different—they are almost two defined destinations: one a shopping centre, the other independent retailers with a very different offer.

By giving councils such as Derby the freedom to set parking charges more flexibly, we can enable local knowledge and understanding to have an impact to meet local demand. It is also important that the local authority consults on increasing the parking charges. There needs to be an opportunity to consider whether the increase is correct, and local people and businesses need to be consulted on whether it is appropriate. I acknowledge that the council could still then raise the charges if it chose to, but it is important that people have the opportunity to have that discussion. It means that there would not be any surprises. Businesses and consumers would at least know that the charges were going up and could take note.

I fully support this incredibly sensible Bill. I cannot emphasise enough the need to support these retailers and independent retailers and to encourage entrepreneurship, and parking is such a simple, effective way of encouraging people into our city centres to see the offer available. The Bill is long overdue. In fact, I am surprised it has not been brought forward before because it makes so much sense. These changes will have a positive impact on villages, towns and cities up and down the country.

11.48 am

**James Morris:** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) on introducing the Bill. It has the virtue of being very simple, which meets one of his criterion, while also meeting the other criteria he laid out. I very much welcome the Bill and support it.

High streets across the UK are under pressure from a shift in spending from physical shops to online shops. There were 15 shop closures a day across the UK in the first half of 2016, and the number of new openings has fallen to the lowest level for five years. That is why local authorities need to be able to do all they can to support local high streets and shops, and the Bill, with its simple

implementation of some new provisions, will give local councils such as mine the flexibility to do so. I know from my own constituency the problems local businesses are facing. Halesowen, Old Hill, Cradley Heath and Blackheath have important high streets within my constituency, with a wide variety of shops, places of worship, local services and entertainment venues popular among local people. However, when I visit any of my local high streets, parking is nearly always the No. 1 concern of local shoppers and business owners.

The Halesowen chamber of trade and local councillors in Halesowen have long campaigned for reduced charges, and, where appropriate, free parking on our local high streets. Conservative councillors have secured an important trial period of two hours of free parking to boost local footfall. If that is successful, I hope it will be extended to all council-owned car parks. The Bill will prove useful to Dudley and Sandwell councils in my constituency, because it will give them the flexibility that will allow them to implement the move more quickly and efficiently. Local residents will have to wait until April for it to come into effect, and local businesses are frustrated at the time that it is taking to get the initiative going.

The chamber of trade is taking steps to increase footfall around the town, considering ideas for more activities, organising celebration events, and consulting local business on what they need to help them to succeed. I congratulate the chamber on the hard work that it has done to establish the first business improvement district in the Dudley borough, and I hope that its well thought out business plan will be approved next week.

Traders' groups throughout the country organise special promotional days to create more interest and increase the number of visitors, but many of them are frustrated by the unnecessary bureaucracy that they face when working with local councils to set promotional parking incentives. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway), many Members will be supporting their local high streets on small business Saturday. We should be using campaigns like that to help our local shopkeepers.

Last week I visited a new business in Halesowen high street, the English Rose Tea Room, owned by the inspirational Gemma. She has fulfilled a lifelong dream of owning a business, and has not allowed the challenges of autism to hold her back. We should be doing everything we can to help to create a business and shopper-friendly environment so that businesses like Gemma's grow and thrive, and the barriers to success are removed.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth mentioned, the Federation of Small Businesses has commented that high parking charges—along with other issues, such as changes in the way people shop—discourage shoppers from visiting traditional high streets. The impact on the high street is most seriously felt by small retailers in smaller town centres, and they agree that making it easier to reduce car parking charges will go some way towards alleviating the pressure, but unfortunately, as other Members have pointed out, many local authorities are planning to hike the charges even further. Last year the Local Government Information Unit think-tank produced a report which suggested that nine out of 10 councils were considering increasing charges for on and off-street parking, despite the enormous amounts of money that had already been raised nationally. That, in my opinion, is a short-sighted measure. It does not

address the problems facing our high streets, and it is just a quick method of finding more ways to make money out of local motorists.

I think it important for councils that decide to increase parking charges to engage properly with local people and businesses. It is only right for there to be proper consultation on measures that could have an adverse impact on local residents. The Bill requires local authorities to consult interested parties, such as local traders' groups, if they are seeking to increase charges, and I welcome that. It is essential for those who work, live and rely on our high streets to feel that they have the opportunity to make their case and that their views will be properly considered.

**Craig Whittaker:** There are local business initiatives in Brighouse and Hebden Bridge in my constituency, and businesses work tirelessly to organise events to boost the footfall in the town centre. Consultations should involve a high level of input from business organisations and traders, because they know exactly what goes on.

**James Morris:** As I said earlier, the Halesowen chamber of trade has done a huge amount of work to increase footfall in the town, and it should be at the front and centre of consultation on the proposed parking charges regime. As my hon. Friend says, those voices in our constituencies need to be heard.

The Bill will not necessarily prohibit any increase in charges. Occasionally it may be necessary to increase them if overhead costs are rising as well, especially in car parks that require access to machines and staff. The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that the impacts on towns are fully considered, not to prevent increases.

On-street parking is often subject to the same level of increases as off-street, although the costs of providing parking spaces are nowhere near the same. As other Members have pointed out, that can make local residents feel that they are a cash cow enabling local authorities to plug a financial hole. A balance needs to be struck. This is not a one-size-fits-all situation, but the Bill will make it quicker and easier for local authorities to do the right thing. It will also give local authorities the flexibility to incentivise the use of car parks which are currently underused. Spaces that they are paying to maintain are sitting idle, which does not benefit either local authorities or shopping centres. Empty car parks can become a magnet for antisocial behaviour and crime. It is important for local authorities to be able to respond to declining numbers quickly, and in the best interests of the local area.

**Jo Churchill:** My hon. Friend makes a salient point. Car parks that have fallen into disrepair, or are hardly used, can indeed become centres for antisocial behaviour, which means that there is a double disincentive for people to visit towns.

**James Morris:** I entirely agree. We must not allow that to happen. Making car parks full and making them places where people want to go is critical to town centre regeneration and the creation of a good retail environment.

I also welcome the Government's move to look at further reforms to the local government transparency code to ensure that motorists can see at first hand a

complete breakdown of the parking charges that their councils impose and how much they raise. There has long been a suspicion among drivers that parking charges and penalties are being used to increase the amount of money that local authorities can spend. Local authorities have no legal powers to set parking charges at a higher level than that needed to achieve the objective of relieving or preventing traffic congestion, and this Bill will make local authorities more mindful of this fact.

In the 2013-14 financial year, councils received just under £739 million from on-street parking and £599 million from off-street parking. The income received varies widely from council to council. The Broads, for example, did not receive any income for parking, whereas Cambridgeshire County Council received over £3 million from on-street parking. In total, councils in England made net profits of £660 million and £343 million from penalty charge notices. My own local authorities, which cover Halesowen and Rowley Regis, have recorded nearly £500,000 between them in profit from parking charges. Local people want, and deserve, to have faith that this money is being used properly.

Under the last Labour Government, revenue from parking increased from £608 million in 1997 to £1.3 billion by 2010. Such parking enforcement has undermined local high streets and I am grateful to the Government, who have since made many efforts to rein in these over-zealous and unfair rules.

In recent years, I have supported the Government's action on tackling higher parking charges and aggressive parking enforcement which have caused considerable distress for thousands of motorists. I congratulate the Government on the measures they have introduced to stop parking charges being used as a stealth tax, including introducing new grace periods and stopping the industrial use of CCTV spy cars. Therefore, I believe it is in the best interests of my constituents, and those of local businesses and high streets, that this Bill, very ably introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth, be enacted.

The link between parking charges and the health of British high streets cannot be underestimated. These changes will make it easier for local authorities to lower their charges to promote economic vitality in our town centres, and, importantly, ensure that if an increase is to be considered, the right steps are taken to make sure that it is properly considered. I believe that these are the right measures to help our local high streets, bring assurance to motorists and inject a much-needed incentive to revive town centres and high streets in my constituency and across the country.

12.1 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) on introducing this important Bill. For as long as I represent the constituents of Thirsk and Malton, I will be a champion of small independent businesses. Everything we do in terms of regulation, taxation and infrastructure should consider the needs of small businesses, and in particular try to create the level playing field with large business that we absolutely need to encourage the success of the local small independent retailer and business. Small independent businesses account for about 60% of our private sector-employed workforce and about 50% of our private sector turnover, so they are hugely important.

[Kevin Hollinrake]

I must draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Our estate agent business has about 190 small, independent outlets around the UK in various high streets and market towns. We do not particularly rely any more on footfall, so that is not a big issue for us in terms of car parking and people coming to town or city centres, but it is a big issue for the general health of our towns, villages and cities in helping to ensure that we have a vibrant and healthy sector in our high streets and town centres.

We started our business in 1992, and it grew and we became the market leader in our town of York, which is where our first business started. We thought, "This is going quite well. We're doing okay here. Our business is starting to prosper." Three or four years later, however, another very good independent started up in York city centre, and started to take market share off us. We had to look very carefully at the business we were operating and what we were doing, and we started to work harder again. It made us focus on what had made us successful in the first place.

That is a small illustration of the importance of small independent businesses. It is not just about the fact that they are at the heart of communities and about the fact that they provide better service, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) said; it is also about their dynamics and the commercial realities of business. Small businesses hold big business to account. Wherever we have a big business monopoly—big businesses tend to monopolise the big out-of-town shopping centres—quality is often not as good. An extreme example of that is BT, which is a private sector monopoly, and we all get letters and complaints from constituents about the lack of quality from private sector monopolies, so we need a balance. This nation quite rightly has many good big businesses—my business aspires to be a big business—but we must ensure that the small independent business sector is vibrant. That is why this Bill is so important.

I have experience of some really bad local government car parking policies, and I referred earlier to the policy in York, where we started our first business. York is not in my constituency, but it is just down the road and many of my constituents work in York or have businesses there—our head office is still in York. The city council had a policy of selling off important city-centre car parks, which created revenue for the council and generated section 106 contributions from the developers of those car parks, but that led to more demand for and pressure on the remaining car parks and the charges were increased. It costs £2 an hour to park in the centre of York—a ridiculous figure that deters people from going into the centre. At the same time, the council granted planning consent for out-of-town shopping centres with free parking, and there are four such centres around York—a town of 200,000 residents. Local businesses were not consulted about that. In the conversations that did happen, there was panic from some independent retailers in the centre of York, but the council pushed ahead anyway, much to the detriment of those city-centre retailers.

There are some more positive examples in my constituency. Hambleton District Council has an innovative policy in some of its towns, such as Thirsk, where the

council allows people to park for an hour in the market square. People get a ticket from the machine and stick it in the window, but they do not have to pay anything for an hour's free parking, or they can pay 60p and park for two hours. That has created shopper turnover in the town centre, which is exactly what businesses want. They want people to come in and shop in that short shopping cycle. It is easy for people to go for lunch or just shop for a short period without having to go home and get their money to put in the machine—unless they want to pay to park for longer.

**Jo Churchill:** The situation is similar in my constituency, which is also near to a larger town—Cambridge in my case. The circumstances in the larger towns are different from those in small, rural environments around small market towns. We want to generate throughput so that traders can survive and so local people, who may be unable to shop without getting in their car, have the same choice as those who live near a town.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** My hon. Friend makes a good point and I could not agree more. We are looking for a symbiotic relationship between the local authority and businesses. There already is a close relationship. The local authority benefits from the success of businesses—retail or otherwise—in its town, but that conversation is sometimes not as comprehensive as it needs to be. The relationship sometimes lacks understanding. The provisions of this Bill about consultation when there is a change to car parking charges and the ability to lower car parking charges without going through a detailed process are why it is so important that we take the Bill through.

My town of Malton is another good example. Unusually, most of the shops, houses and car parks in the centre are owned by a family estate, the Fitzwilliam estate. It is in the estate's interest for the centre to be a vibrant commercial environment, so, as well as investing heavily in the town and in improving the shops, it gave two hours of free parking in the town centre car parks. That has developed the fantastically vibrant commercial activity we see in Malton.

Malton has been tremendously successful and very clever. A guy called Tom Naylor-Leyland set out to develop a brand around Malton, which he calls Yorkshire's food capital. The Malton food festival is a fantastic weekend, and hon. Members must consider coming—it is a wonderful weekend to attend. It is vibrant, with music and a beer festival. There is some of Yorkshire's finest food, and Yorkshire is the finest place for food, as Members can tell. The food festival has been a wonderful success story, and the town has regenerated on the back of it. It has to be seen to be believed. There is a symbiotic relationship between the car park owners, the town centre owners and the businesses, with a deep understanding between the three.

A lot of coach parties come to see the wonders of Helmsley, a fantastic market town. Richard III, the last king of the house of York, had a connection with Helmsley castle, as well as with Richmond castle. As the Minister said earlier, Helmsley was successful in the British high street awards, winning best market town on the back of the fantastic efforts of the town's traders and local authority. Coach parking charges were introduced in one of its car parks, which deterred coaches carrying 50 tourists from coming to the town. Local people went

to the council and campaigned on that issue, and they got the parking charges removed, which brought the coach parties back to the town. That is a good example of how businesses and local authorities, working together, can have a positive effect and foster a deep understanding of some of the challenges of running small independent businesses.

Those are positive examples, but we have heard others. According to the Royal Automobile Club, £756 million was spent on charges and penalties for parking in car parks across the UK in 2016, which is up 9% on 2015 and up 34% on 2010. That can be a tax on shoppers, and it can also be a tax on businesses. Businesses are paying rates and want service from their council yet, as we have heard, they are seen as sitting ducks or golden geese, or as both at the same time. We should make sure that we look after those golden geese and not treat them as sitting ducks because, ultimately, shoppers and businesses will vote with their feet.

**Mr Marcus Jones:** Does my hon. Friend think that local authorities that take the wrong approach are likely to cook their goose?

**Kevin Hollinrake:** That is a very good point. It has been a fantastic debate. We have talked about some of the foul consequences of not having good parking policies in local towns. We did mention the Dog and Duck earlier—our local pub is called the Durham Ox. Members may ask, “Durham? In Yorkshire? Why is that?” It is because it has a connection with the Neville family, which is also linked to Richard III. It was a staging post on the way from Durham cathedral to York Minster.

In conclusion, what we need is a level playing field. We must always look after the interests of small business. We should not, in this House, worship at the altar of big business. We should absolutely put small business and independent retailers at the heart of everything we do. I absolutely support the provisions in this Bill, because that is exactly what it does.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, may I remind Members that the Bill is quite narrow? Even though all the contributions are very enjoyable, it would be nice sometimes just to mention car parking charges. I call Helen Whately.

12.15 pm

**Helen Whately:** I shall do my best to focus on the content of the Bill. I must congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) on bringing in this brief but important Bill, which, as other Members have said, could be of such benefit to our constituents. It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) who has talked about the many benefits of the Bill. Although I will try to stick to the topic, I will follow his example in ensuring that I do not duck the issues that need to be raised.

I am very lucky to represent a constituency that is peppered with historic towns and villages. In particular, there is the historic market town of Faversham and the

villages of Lenham and Headcorn. I mention those not because the other villages are not worthwhile and worth visiting, but because those three all have car parks. The car parks are very important, as they allow residents to access the shops and services in each of those centres. Despite the pressures and the appeal of out-of-town shopping, supermarkets and the internet, those centres are doing pretty well.

Just last year, Faversham was a rising star award winner in the Great British High Street awards. I take great pleasure in regularly shopping in the town. There are lots of small shops that provide goods and services that can be quite hard to find. If someone goes to the supermarket or an out-of-town store, they are unlikely, for instance, to be able to get their pictures framed. In town, they can get a fabulous selection of flowers in the florist—an appropriate bunch can be made up for them to take to an event. A yarn shop has recently opened, serving the boom in knitting, sewing and crafts. There are new shops opening in the town as well as many historic sites to visit.

These towns and villages are managing despite the pressures that they are under, but it is not easy. Sadly, Faversham had to say goodbye to its sweetshop just a couple of weeks ago. It was a lovely feature of the town, as all its sweets looked so attractive. That has now fallen foul of the pressures we have been discussing, as well as our attempts to live healthier lives. Perhaps the children of Faversham are not eating so many sweets now. I know that my son will miss going to that shop when we cycle into town; it has been a destination for us.

I value our towns and village centres enormously, as I know many of my constituents do. It is not just about the shops that we can visit, but the way in which these centres serve as a community meeting place. People in the market square, or in the marketplace in Faversham, will often bump into somebody they have not seen for a while. For me, it is a great way to catch up with constituents and councillors. I almost always meet not one but several people as I go through Faversham. My husband knows not to expect me back at the time I have said, as I will inevitably meet several people and have long conversations as I go through.

**Kevin Foster:** Does my hon. Friend agree that one way of keeping town centres vibrant and strong and, as she says, centres of the community is to ensure that car parking prices vary depending on the events that are going on and to encourage people to go into the town? Prices should also be competitive.

**Helen Whately:** That is exactly why I am discussing the value of town and village centres and their importance to the community. Car parking charges can help towns and villages to play exactly that role.

As I was saying, chance meetings in the town or villages centre are a valuable part of keeping communities strong. We need our communities to get stronger again, so chance meetings are really important. I would not deny that large out-of-town shopping centres have an important role to play. Some of my constituents will go to the Bluewater centre when they want to get clothes or do a big shop. It is not in my constituency, so I am not a regular visitor there, but I know it has a role to play. Nevertheless, it is not the place where people are going

[Helen Whately]

to bump into somebody they have not seen for a while, or at least they are not so likely to.

It is difficult for our towns and villages to compete with destination shopping sites and with the internet, and parking charges are a factor in that. Other Members have referred to the Federation of Small Businesses, the Portas review and several other sources that say that car parking charges are a significant factor in people deciding where they are going to shop. In a rural area, as much as we want to encourage people to use other modes of transport, the reality is that the car is how most people need to travel, so parking charges are a factor in most people's shopping decisions.

For the sake of our towns and villages, many of us would like to see car parking charges that are as low as possible. Nevertheless, having discussed this with some of my local councillors, I do understand that it is not as simple as just putting charges down to the lowest possible level, or getting rid of them altogether. The revenue needed to maintain car parks is an element. Also, if there is a station near the town centre, we do not want the town centre car park to be used for all-day station parking. There is a risk that were car parking charges to be completely got rid of, such a car park would just be used for station parking and there would be no footfall from people coming and going because they would not be able to use the car park to get to the shops. It is therefore important for there to be flexibility in the level of parking charges.

It is also important for a council to be able to experiment and find out what works. Critically, as the Bill would allow, we must enable councils to reduce car parking charges at certain times and for special events. If there is a station in the town, it may be impossible to have very low parking charges all the time, but the charges could be reduced for specific events. Faversham is a fantastic town for special events. My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton mentioned the food festival in Malton in his constituency; well, Faversham has a food festival and a separate beer festival—we do not have to have them on the same day! Actually, it is known as the Faversham Hop festival; I shall be called out if people think I have been calling it the beer festival. Incidentally, a lot of people come to that particular festival by train; hon. Members may understand why.

We have a food festival, and also a hat festival. We have a nautical festival, because Faversham is nautical town as well as a beer town, a transport festival, and markets on the first and third Saturdays of the month. There are many events to come to in Faversham, and those could be days for the council to drop car parking charges. Or, the council might experiment with dropping the charges on days when the town is quieter as a way to bring people into the town when no event is taking place. The point is that the Bill is about giving councils more flexibility so that they can make changes and test what works to bring more footfall into the town. That is why I am delighted to support the Bill.

It is worth emphasising, however, that increasing car parking charges is another matter. Such increases should be consulted on with some rigour, because they are a concern for residents and businesses. Given how parking charges affect people's decisions, increasing them could clearly be a concern for businesses and some might

worry that they would be put out of business, so it is absolutely right that there should be consultation if car parking charges are to increase.

I checked with my local councils what their thoughts were about the Bill. I was in touch with Councillor David Burton, the chair of the transportation committee of Maidstone Borough Council, which is one of the two councils that my constituency overlaps with, and he said that he was happy with the Bill and that it will place no extra burdens on local councils. I thought that that was a good thing to hear. He flags up how he thinks that the excellent modern transport Bill will be valuable. He emphasises that councils will have to move quickly to keep up with the pace of change.

I certainly welcome the fact that my local councils have been good at introducing payments by smart phone for car parking charges—a method that is helpful, when thinking of flexibility, in enabling people to pay as they leave or to top up easily while they are parked. It is important that councils use such things to help to support local towns and villages and the shops in them.

To conclude, I very much support town and village centres and want to see them thriving. I am therefore delighted to support the Bill.

12.26 pm

**Wendy Morton:** I rise to support the Bill again today, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) on all his work in getting it thus far. I am sure from the comments that we have heard today that all Members wish it a speedy passage through the House, because we understand the benefits that it will bring to our constituents and constituencies.

I believe that the Bill really will make a difference right across the country, as my hon. Friend has said. He used the phrase “we come into politics to make a difference”, and the Bill can make a difference to very many people in such a small and very simple way. Its aim is essentially to make it easier for local authorities to lower their parking charges to promote the economic vitality of town centres, by allowing local authorities to react more quickly to market changes, putting them on an even footing with the private sector and promoting parking flexibility, about which we have heard so much today, by allowing them to provide free or discounted parking at short notice to support town centre events.

The Bill is intended to make provision for local authorities to consult interested parties if they seek to increase the cost of parking charges, and to ensure that the impacts on towns are considered. It was described earlier as the Santa Claus Bill, but this Bill is not just for Christmas; I believe that it is for all year round. [Interruption.] I apologise; I needed to get that one in today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway), who is no longer in her place, asked why we have not sought to change the law before. It seems crazy that if local authorities want to offer free parking in the weeks up to Christmas or on Thursdays for late-night shopping or for special events, it will cost them to do so because of the requirement to issue all the necessary advertisements. That seems hardly an incentive for local authorities to go down that route. In fact, it is almost a barrier to their making those changes.

In today's economic climate, we hear a lot about the rise of internet shopping and out-of-town shopping centres. They all have their roles to play, but it strikes me that the Bill offers a simple and cost-effective way to enable councils to effect change. It is not about saying that they must lower all car parking charges, although there is many a day when we would all like that. It is about giving councils the flexibility to lower car parking charges when they feel that that decision is in the interests of the local community and takes into account the community's needs. The Bill is a tool in the toolbox of local authorities.

Councils can win from the reduction in advertising costs. Residents can win because it will save them money. Crucially, retailers and local high streets can win as well. I understand that car parking revenue is important to local authorities, and I have mentioned the need to strike a balance. Local authorities may gain extra revenue overall from reducing car parking charges—for an event, for example—and from businesses, because if a town centre is thriving, income may be gained from business rates. The Bill is about local authorities being able to react quickly and support local events, businesses and residents.

My constituency of Aldridge-Brownhills is fortunate, as we do have some free parking, particularly in Aldridge village centre. I am a firm believer that free parking encourages people to shop locally, which is something that hon. Members on both sides of the House often mention and encourage residents to do. People pop into the local shops, do their banking and pop into the post office. If they are in Aldridge, they probably have a cup of coffee at Simply Delicious or at Sweet. People spend that little bit more time in the town centre, which adds to the vibrancy of the place.

The Bill is about cutting bureaucracy, which is something that Conservative Members often talk about. Put very simply, it is a no-nonsense common sense Bill, and I will support it.

12.32 pm

**Jo Churchill:** It is my pleasure also to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) on bringing forward what is—unusually in this place—a simple Bill with a simple aim that affects a great number of people.

I welcome the fact that it is easier for local councils to sort out their car parking, but I want to speak a little bit about enabling them to have a sense of place. That is a really important factor, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) alluded, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), who said that we should not be looking for a one-size-fits-all solution. A sense of place is about local authorities understanding their locality, including businesses, residents and the people who visit the town. Our towns are changing, which is why local authorities need flexibility.

In the town of Bury St Edmunds, residents live near businesses and tourist attractions, and a vast number of tourists visit. As I mentioned earlier, we have getting towards 2 million short-stay parking slots each year in a town of some 42,000. That shows the popularity of the town, but it also shows that we need to have local flexibility and accountability. A very different situation

exists down the A14 in Stowmarket, which is also in my constituency. Stowmarket has a less vibrant town centre, so the local authority will need to apply different measures to accommodate its businesses and stimulate a vibrant economy that is right for the town. As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) said, the provision is about building communities. It is about people having the time to go into town centres and actually enjoy where they live.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** My hon. Friend makes a good point about the different types of town in her constituency. Is not the point of the Bill to require local authorities to work alongside businesses in order to develop the right strategies—for parking or other things—so that those businesses can make the best of their opportunities, no matter which conurbation they are in?

**Jo Churchill:** Absolutely—I could not agree more.

Bury St Edmunds has a 6% retail occupancy rate, which, as my hon. Friend will know, is very low—in fact, it is 50% of the national average. Bury St Edmunds won the award for the best Christmas fair anywhere in the country this year. It has a plethora of things we can enjoy. It has its own cathedral. Tonight, I hope to attend a performance of “Northanger Abbey” at the Theatre Royal, which is one of the only regency theatres in the country. All of that is fantastic, but there are also great things in Stowmarket and Needham Market. However, these places are different, and we need to understand how the Bill can address that.

There is one thing I would like to ask the Minister, and perhaps he can write to me if today is not the time to tease it out. In my area, I have a county council, a borough council, a district council and three town councils. Very often, it is only the fact that those councils work well together that facilitates solutions, despite the complexity involved in different authorities owning different car parks. For example, when Stowmarket Town Council wished to have a cheaper parking rate of £1 for two hours, that was facilitated through collaboration with the district council. Sometimes in these multiple tiers, we have a complexity that even a simple instrument such as this Bill may not address. There might be a little more work to do to deal with areas where things are not as simple as in a unitary authority or a metropolitan authority so that those areas can have conversations that facilitate changes to their local environment—to their car parking—more quickly than is possible at the moment.

That is particularly pertinent in places such as Bury, where we have the contra-problem to a lot of towns: we often do not have enough car parking spaces. It would be really good if these places could drive issues such as the funding of multi-storey car parks, which would allow us to have more parking so that our town centres are not sclerotic. When our town centres are blocked—hopefully, that is what the Bill will address—it is my residents who suffer. When people park somewhere in the town without thinking, residents cannot access their houses. Permits are good, but they stop people parking for business, and that is what I mean about this issue being about the whole environment.

**Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab):** I agree with the hon. Lady. I think there are still issues with the Bill. Does she

[Lyn Brown]

think, like me, that it should perhaps not have had its Third Reading today and that we should have spent longer in Committee ironing out some of these issues?

**Jo Churchill:** No, I do not. The beauty of this Bill is its simplicity, and that is why I would like it to go through today. However, as with most things in this place, we live in a fast-moving environment, where things constantly change around us.

My point to the Minister is that, where we have a complexity of local government, with different authorities having responsibility for car parking, we should perhaps look to address that as we go forward.

**Kevin Foster:** Does my hon. Friend recall, like me, that the Bill had its Report stage earlier today? That would have been an opportunity for anyone who had objections to the wording of the Bill to make some changes, and I suggested a new clause myself.

**Jo Churchill:** Indeed. I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. A plethora of people have spoken to the Bill today, but there has been somewhat of a dearth of Opposition Members not only saying what benefits a simple Bill such as this could bring but challenging it, as it would be appropriate to.

**Andy Slaughter:** I am listening to the hon. Lady, and I think she is pushing her luck. A lot of Opposition Members are very, very angry about the fact that the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) is being talked out by her and her friends on the Government Back Benches today. If she wants to do that, she can play games, but will she please not criticise us?

**Jo Churchill:** It was merely, I felt, a statement of fact.

While we are considering this Bill, it is, as others have said, incumbent on us to look at where we are going in future. My town council in Bury St Edmunds, in order to help ameliorate some of the problems around the car parking situation, has usefully recruited a police community support officer, Emily Howell, to regain control over the civil parking enforcement from the police, because that is a problem in the town. She has single-handedly authorised over 100 civil parking orders in her first few weeks, including, amusingly—or not—for the leader of the town council, who recruited her. She is delivering greater monitoring powers to local councils in exercising local parking management. I hope that this Bill will add to that as we move forward.

12.40 pm

**Kevin Foster:** I am conscious of the time and how much has been said already, so I will keep my remarks rather brief.

As I said when I withdrew my new clause, I think it is absolutely right that this Bill goes forward in its current form. It will give local councils a valuable opportunity to vary charges downwards without going through the consultation process that currently exists. It is right, if charges are going up, to get a feel for the whole community's perspective, but somewhat bizarre that under the current rules and legislation the council has to spend money to do something that would cost it money, but for a wider

benefit. The Bill will be very beneficial in dealing with some of the issues that I used to encounter when I was in local government. I will not go through a whole list of the festivals and events that happen in Torbay—I covered some of that on Report—but I do think this will be a valuable opportunity in that regard.

The key thing that I would like to hear from the Minister is how, assuming this Bill is successful in the other place, the Department for Communities and Local Government will work with councils to make sure that its provisions are used. The point that I sometimes make in debates on Fridays and at other times is that legislation is not just something we do for the fun of it—it will actually have an impact. What interest and assessment has he already had from authorities that will look to use this power? What will he do to promote it once these provisions are brought into effect? I will be interested to hear his comments about how this work will be taken forward. This Bill is in the right form and perfectly acceptable, and it should receive its Third Reading today.

12.42 pm

**Mr Marcus Jones:** I am pleased to speak in support of the Bill's Third Reading. I congratulate my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour, the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), who is introducing this Bill in his 30th year in the House. I wish him well in getting it through Third Reading unopposed and through the other place unamended. I understand that it is his first private Member's Bill. As somebody who, not too long ago, was on the Back Benches, I was never fortunate during that time to secure a private Member's Bill, generally because I never appeared far enough up the ballot. I never had the chance to bring forward such important legislation, so I do congratulate him.

As I indicated on Second Reading, parking remains a very familiar issue. My ministerial postbag remains very busy with the numerous missives that I receive on parking, and Royal Mail continues to enjoy the rewards. In the three months since we started this process in November, I have continued to receive a significant level of correspondence.

High streets and town centres are essential parts of the fabric of our lives, and they are the social core of our communities. Affordable parking that enables people to access town centres is critical to the continued growth of our high streets. The previous Government recognised that fact in a number of reforms of council-owned parking facilities. The previous Government made it mandatory for local authorities to give 10-minute grace periods in all on-street and off-street parking bays. That gives consumers in town centres greater flexibility and allows them to complete their business in the town without having to worry about feeding the meter.

The use of CCTV camera cars as revenue-generating devices by local authorities has been a cause for concern. That is why the Conservative-led coalition Government banned councils from sending car parking tickets through the post, to give individuals a degree of certainty that if they get a ticket, they will know about it on the day.

Alongside the Bill, we are looking to improve transparency. The Government believe in town hall transparency, and they believe that transparency is the foundation of local accountability. It is the key that allows people to access the tools they need to hold their

local council to account. Since 2010, transparency at town halls has improved greatly. The Conservative-led coalition Government changed the rules on attending town hall meetings to enable the press and public to attend, report and film proceedings. We have also changed the rules on the information that local authorities must make public, because transparency is good for the health of democracy.

In 2011, the Government issued the code of recommended practice for local authorities on data transparency to place more power in citizens' hands, to increase democratic accountability and to make it easier for people to contribute to local decision making and shape local public services. The scope and content of the 2011 code was reviewed in 2012, and my Department consulted on a proposed update. As a result of the consultation, the Government published a revised local government transparency code in October 2014 and further updated it in February 2015. Since October 2014, compliance with part 2 of the code has been mandatory. The code requires certain authorities to publish certain information, which includes information about parking.

We encourage local authorities to produce an annual report about their enforcement activities within six months of the end of each financial year. The report should cover financial, statistical and other data reflecting the revenues received from car parking operations. The Department for Transport requires those data to help it to develop parking policy. There is a concern that the data being supplied are not as comprehensive as they should be, and most local authorities do not feel obligated to provide them. Accordingly, when we consulted last year about updates to the transparency code, we proposed that the requirements to publish data relating to local authorities' parking accounts be expanded to include greater detail about parking charges.

We also propose that local authorities publish statistics about their enforcement of parking restrictions. Specifically, we propose that local authorities be required to provide data on total income and expenditure on the parking account kept under section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, and on off-street parking charges and penalty charges, which are not covered by section 55 of the 1984 Act; that point was raised by several hon. Members. We propose that local authorities be required to provide a breakdown of income from on-street parking charges, on-street penalty charges, off-street parking charges and off-street penalty charges.

The responses to the proposal were enlightening, but not altogether surprising. They confirmed that parking data are of great interest to the public, and why would they not be? After council tax, parking charges are arguably one of the most visible ways that local authorities take money from the public.

The Bill recognises not only that councils need flexibilities, but that councils need to involve local communities in their decision-making process. The Bill offers a real opportunity for a small but sensible reform to local authority car parks and will give the Government powers to scrap the bureaucratic requirements on local authorities if they wish to lower their parking charges. It also offers a real opportunity for councils to take a flexible approach to support their high streets—for example, by responding to the opportunity to have town centre festivals, which several hon. Members referred to.

From my involvement in the Great British High Street competition in 2015, I learnt about the real passion that still exists in this country for high streets and town centres. However, although it is necessary for councils to be flexible in respect of parking charges to support their town centres, it is important to recognise that charging levels are often a significant concern for town centre businesses. The Government therefore think that it is fit and proper that councils are responsive to local concern before seeking to increase charges. My hon. Friend's Bill provides for a consultation requirement if councils want to raise charges on an existing traffic order. It is sensible that this reform balances the needs of the local authority to set a fair pricing policy that rightly takes into account local people's views.

In conclusion, I appreciate the points that have been made today. I am grateful for the way in which the House has handled the Bill and I thank the many colleagues who have made significant contributions. As I said when we started to consider the Bill, it represents a small but needed reform to help to deliver a more effective parking model that supports our great British high streets and town centres. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his Bill having made it this far, and I hope that it ultimately becomes an Act of Parliament.

12.52 pm

**David Tredinnick:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I welcome you to your place. I thank all colleagues who have contributed to the debate today, and I wish the Bill well on its travels to the House of Lords. I point out to their noble lordships and ladyships that the Bill passed through the Commons unamended; there were no amendments in Committee, but there were discussions and agreement with the Opposition.

I say to the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), who has just expressed concerns, that there were opportunities to load the Bill with a lot more material. However, it was kept very narrow because, from my long experience of Fridays in the House, I knew that it would not proceed unless that was the case. To continue with an earlier play on words, I hope that the noble Lords will get their ducks in a row, but I hope that they will not add to them. We have quite enough here.

It would be instructive for councils up and down the land to study this debate. There have been some wonderful contributions; I will pick up two or three points that have come up. My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) spoke with experience of starting and expanding a small business. His point about the power of offering one hour's free parking, then charging an additional 60p per hour, was very persuasive, and many councils up and down the land should take note.

My hon. Friends the Members for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) and for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) mentioned festivals, and hon. Members focused on the importance of having special events that draw people into towns. We need flexibility in parking charges for those events.

I thank the members of the Public Bill Committee for their help, along with the other Members I have already thanked today. I thank the two Ministers who have spoken on the Bill—my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning, who spoke in Committee,

[David Tredinnick]

and my neighbour the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), who has spoken today. As I have said, I have also had the support of the Opposition. I thank my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for allowing me access to some of his officials—I know it is not normal to thank officials, but I thank Phillip Dunkley and Thomas Adams for their assistance in ensuring that I was properly briefed.

It is with great happiness and surprise that I find myself having taken through the House a private Member's Bill that can affect every town, city and large village in the country. I hope that it will proceed through the House of Lords.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

## Broadcasting (Radio Multiplex Services) Bill

*Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee.*

### Clause 1

#### SMALL-SCALE RADIO MULTIPLEX SERVICES

12.56 pm

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I beg to move amendment 1, page 1, line 4, after “may” insert “after public consultation”.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing)**: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 2, page 2, line 17, at end insert—

“(4A) The Secretary of State is not to make an order under this section in relation to small scale radio multiplex services except where the description is of services to be provided primarily for the good of members of the public or of a particular community, rather than for commercial services.”

Amendment 3, line 17, at end insert—

“(4A) The Secretary of State must not make an order under this section in relation to small-scale radio multiplex services except where the order includes conditions to provide for capacity on small-scale radio multiplex to be reserved for broadcasting services of a description set out in an order under section 262.”

*This amendment ensures that radio stations that meet the description of Community Radio under section 262 of the Communications Act 2003 are guaranteed carriage on small-scale radio multiplexes.*

**Wendy Morton**: I will speak briefly to my two amendments, amendments 1 and 2, because I appreciate that time is marching on.

I have supported the Bill, promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), throughout—I attended Second Reading and was on the Public Bill Committee. However, during the Bill Committee and on reflection afterwards, I felt that a couple of details that are not in the Bill were worthy of a little more probing.

Amendment 1 relates to public consultation. The Bill is important, stretching across many different facets, and will potentially reach many different communities. On Second Reading, the Government indicated that they would conduct a form of consultation and review with all the relevant stakeholders on the technical details of the Bill. However, given the Bill's technical nature, I seek some reassurances from the Minister on that consultation, hence the proposed insertion of “after public consultation”. There are some very small community radio stations, often run by community volunteers, and I want to be certain that they will be part of the consultation process. It would be wrong if they were excluded in favour of the larger stations.

Turning to amendment 2, concerns were expressed about the Bill in Committee, particularly those that had been raised by the Community Media Association. I am concerned that the provision in proposed new section 258A(4)(c) of the Communications Act 2003 that an order under clause 1 may

“require small-scale radio multiplex services to be provided on a non-commercial basis”

is not a sufficient guarantee that such services will be operated primarily for public and community benefit.

We heard much on Second Reading about the benefits of community radio and how it can get into the hard-to-reach communities that Members of all parties are all too familiar with. I seek reassurance about that. Where a small-scale radio multiplex service is run on a commercial basis, there is a high risk that charges to small-scale and community radio content providers could remain excessive, and that opportunities for those radio operators to reduce costs through the sale of spare capacity could be lost, which would be a shame.

A commercially operated, small-scale radio multiplex operator might be inclined to populate available capacity with content from providers prepared to pay the highest rate, rather than content of the greatest public value. For example, content providers with low fixed costs, such as those providing semi-automated—predominantly music—services, might be better placed to afford the high costs of transmission than content providers that invest in original local content, including speech and local journalism. Such community stations go to the heart of our communities.

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My amendment 2 proposes that small-scale radio multiplex services be required to operate for public and community benefit, rather than for commercial reasons, in order to favour existing community radio providers or consortia of small-scale local and community media, so that they might come together and operate the multiplex. This would not preclude a small-scale local commercial radio service from playing a lead role in establishing a not-for-profit vehicle to hold the multiplex licence or from operating it on such a basis that local radio services, including small-scale commercial radio services, can be provided with free or low-cost carriage and surpluses generated invested in local content production.

This is such a forward-looking and important Bill. I just want to be sure that we reach out to those parts of the community that benefit from community radio.

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): I was going to make a speech echoing the hon. Lady's comments, as I wholeheartedly agree with the principles she is espousing, but I will not now, in the hope that we can get to the Bill in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis).

**Wendy Morton:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady. She can be reassured. I was just about to sit down. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay and the Minister can give us the reassurances we are looking for and that I will be able to withdraw my amendment.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I rise to speak briefly to my amendment 3. I was here for Second Reading so for me this is episode 2. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), I wish to probe further the provisions as they affect community radio, the importance of which I have spoken about before. The amendment states:

“The Secretary of State must not make an order under this section in relation to small-scale radio multiplex services except where the order includes conditions to provide for capacity on small-scale radio multiplex to be reserved for broadcasting services of a description set out in an order under section 262.”

In layman's language, I want to know that there will be enough space in the system for community radio. Ofcom did some trialling, and, according to the pie

chart it produced, existing local commercial radio made up 9.2% of content, existing local community stations made up 18.3% and new formats made up a staggering 72.5%. That shows a real appetite for community stations. The Bill has to take this into account to ensure adequate provision. There is evidently a thirst for radio serving the local community.

**Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): The same report said not only that was there an appetite for community radio but that it was technically possible and economically sustainable.

**Jo Churchill:** I thank my hon. Friend for adding weight to my desire to probe further and to ensure that local community radio can take its place, rightfully and vibrantly, at the centre of the community. Ofcom, which trialled this, is also keen to deliver the provision.

The purpose of the amendment is to establish what access there will be to multiplexes specifically. Forces radio is hugely important to a certain sector of the community. Universities run radio stations that reach out to the student cohorts. Churches and cathedrals have their own stations. However, there are also new forms of media—groups and enterprises that want to reach out to and inform their local communities. They all have minimal budgets, and most have charitable status. If they cannot secure the space that will give them access to a cohort of listeners, what is the point? Surely we can ring-fence a little bit of that space for the people who need it.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I urge my hon. Friends the Members for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) and for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) not to press their amendments.

I understand the purpose of amendment 1, and I also noted the comments of the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown). I realise that the amendment is intended to ensure that the views of local communities can be heard when a licence application is made. However, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills will consider withdrawing it, given that the aim of the Bill is to create a lighter-touch regulatory regime for the smallest radio stations.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The Bill is indeed about small commercial stations, and about the ability of community groups to broadcast. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must not allow the multiplexes to be dominated by large media companies, so that we do not end up with monopolies or people holding several licences?

**Kevin Foster:** I shall deal with the point in some detail when I speak about amendment 3. However, I agree that the thrust of the Bill is to enable community stations to go on to DAB. Theoretically they are already able to do so, but at present the scale is so large that very few operators of community stations have that opportunity. The example of London is often given. London's local area is London, so community station operators wishing to operate in a particular part of it would find it extremely difficult to do so, because they would have to pay the costs of transmission to London. The sponsor's

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message about an MOT for a car in Croydon is unlikely to be very relevant to someone living in Barking and Dagenham.

As I said in Committee, the Bill should be seen as the first stage of a three-stage process. It provides a legal framework for Government action. Without it, the DAB community sector simply will not exist, and the 10 trials will disappear. It also provides for a very limited ability to amend primary legislation through the affirmative procedure for specific purposes. That reflects what was done with community radio in 2004 and with local television in 2012, in strikingly similar circumstances and for strikingly similar purposes. I know that Members rightly wish to be careful about provisions of that kind, but I think that this provision makes sense, given its striking similarity to parliamentary precedent. The second stage will be the orders that will be necessary to create the detailed structure, which will be subject to detailed consultation. The third and final stage will be the issuing of licences by Ofcom to the individual multiplex operators.

Amendment 1 asks for public consultation. In fact, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Digital and Culture confirmed on Second Reading that the Government would initiate a full consultation on the details of how the new licensing scheme for small-scale digital radio multiplexes should operate. That consultation will enable the Government to take account of the different views expressed by community and commercial radio operators, and provide appropriate protections to ensure that licences offered by Ofcom are taken up and the position of community stations wanting DAB carriage are protected.

**Wendy Morton:** I am not expecting a timeframe to be set today, but may I stress the importance of ensuring that the consultation process is long enough to allow community radio operators to feed in their views?

**Kevin Foster:** My understanding is that the Government will have a suitable timescale to allow all to contribute. It is also worth saying that groups like the Community Media Association are already well aware of this Bill and its provisions, and I suspect that many operators, in particular community stations, will be starting to think about the contributions they will wish to make to the consultation.

My hon. Friend is welcome to intervene again if I am wrong, but I assume that her amendment is to ensure that the consultation requirement will apply to orders made under the Bill, rather than requiring a statutory consultation on each individual licence issued under those orders.

**Wendy Morton:** Yes, I confirm that.

**Kevin Foster:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I therefore hope Members will accept that if every order under this Act were required by statute to be subject to a full public consultation, that would strike at the heart of the intention behind this Bill. The intention is to create a regulatory framework that can be flexible and adaptable within a defined area under this legislation. It may therefore not always be appropriate for every order made using this power to be preceded by a full public consultation. The Government do need to have the

flexibility to act quickly to correct deficiencies or make minor and technical changes without having to wait for the conclusion of a consultation—a consultation that could make very little sense to all but a very small number of those involved in the technical side of digital radio.

The technology is moving on significantly. Obviously, internet stations, which are not regulated at all, are able to broadcast with no licence as such, but, with technology moving on and new technologies developing, things can become even more simple, and it is right that the Government have the ability to reflect that, but more serious changes would need to be the subject of consultation. However, if statutorily we say that any order under this power needs to have a consultation, that could be inhibiting or, as I have touched on in previous debates in the House, could lead to consultations that very few people will wish to engage with, or feel there is anything meaningful to be said, as effectively they are about technical details.

My understanding is that once the initial consultation on the new regime is complete, the Government will set out the detailed licensing and regulatory arrangements in an order, which will in turn be subject to debate by both Houses of Parliament before coming into effect. There is also parallel work for the Government to do with Ofcom on other detailed arrangements relating to the functioning of the new licensing regime. I hope that gives my hon. Friend the explanation she needs as to what consultation will happen, and she will agree to withdraw her amendment.

Turning to my hon. Friend's second amendment, I fully appreciate the sentiment behind it—touched on in the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake)—particularly given the passion of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills for promoting legislation that benefits charities, although I hope that for the reasons I am about to set out she will also agree to withdraw this amendment.

Under the Bill, proposed new section 258A(4)(c) already enables the Secretary of State to

“require small-scale radio multiplex services to be provided on a non-commercial basis.”

This gives an opportunity for a requirement to be placed in a licence, where appropriate, that it must seek to provide a basic infrastructure to an area, rather than be done on a profit-making basis.

As I mentioned on Second Reading, we must be clear that a multiplex is about providing the infrastructure for small-scale DAB operations; it is not the individual services we would tune into, although of course inherently we need the infrastructure for those services to exist. This means that part of the objective behind the amendment is already provided for in the Bill. It would not be the right approach to definitively require through this Bill that small-scale multiplexes be provided on a non-commercial basis in every instance, because this issue will be subject to the consultation.

I believe there are likely to be opposing views in the future consultation as to whether services on the multiplex should include those being run on a commercial basis, and I would not want to prejudge the consultation by closing off this option in the Bill. I would also state that while it is not a specific aim of the Bill, any future move

to have a totally digital broadcast system for radio would require an option being provided to small-scale commercial stations to move on to DAB. The current system of national and local multiplexes does not do that, as evidenced by the lack of growth of genuinely local stations going on to existing multiplexes.

The evidence from the 10 trials indicates nearly 70 unique radio services being provided, and the breakdown of them by Niocast Digital—also quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds—showed that 18.3% were existing community stations, 9.2% were existing commercial stations and 72.5% were new formats. I hope this will give significant comfort to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills that community stations are getting on to DAB when this kind of structure is in place, as we have seen with the trial schemes, and as I would envisage being the case under the Bill's provisions. Again, as mentioned earlier, the detail of how the new licensing regime should operate will be subject to full consultation and the detailed arrangements will be set out in an order. In turn, that will be subject to debate in both Houses of Parliament, again providing an opportunity for Members to ensure that community radio objectives are included.

1.15 pm

The Government will need to receive views on commercial involvement in small-scale multiplexes, such as on the number of licences a person or organisation can hold, which was mentioned in amendment 4, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton but not selected. I recognise that these important issues were raised by the Community Media Association, and, to his credit, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) gave voice to them during Committee, rightly seeking several reassurances. I accept all that, but it is right that the Government maintain an open mind and I urge Members to resist amendment 2. If we agree to amendments 1 and 2 now, there will be no opportunity to debate or change things at a later date. One reason why we are here discussing this Bill is that the previous legislation is now too inflexible for an era in which technology has moved on significantly.

I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds will consider not pressing amendment 3. I totally appreciate the intention behind reserving space for community stations and, given her strong work in the Ministry of Defence, I suspect that that may be partly motivated by the superb work done by the British Forces Broadcasting Service in several bases around the UK. It would be natural for such stations to be able to migrate on to DAB if they choose. Indeed, I want to be clear that this is about choice. It will not be compulsory for anyone to use a small-scale DAB multiplex instead of a traditional community FM licence. However, if we were going for an all-digital solution, we would need to provide a practical opportunity for licensees to migrate. The problem with amendment 3 is that it would require the Government to adopt a policy position by statute and would effectively prejudice the consultation that will examine the necessity of reserving capacity for community stations. As the Member in charge of this Bill, I want it to allow maximum flexibility in creating the new regulatory regime that will follow.

Members must bear in mind that there are literally hundreds of potential locations for small-scale multiplexes, some of which may not be viable with specifically reserved

space. Alternatively, other operations may make reserved space unnecessary in the case of a particular multiplex. I want Ofcom to be able to license small-scale multiplexes to operate on conditions that are appropriate for the particular localities that they will cover. I also would not want a provision that creates a radio version of a parliamentary train service: a small bit of capacity kept just to meet a statutory requirement, not to deliver a real goal. Ultimately, that issue will be the subject of a full consultation that will follow this Bill becoming law, but we can see evidence from the 10 existing trials of what will happen when the suggested system in the Bill is set up and community stations start coming on. It is worth bearing in mind that the whole impetus behind the small-scale trial that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport initiated in December 2013 was about ensuring that small, community stations and commercial stations have a digital option. If the strong shift to digital radio continues, that option needs to be practical.

The biggest change in the past few years, and certainly since the previous legislation, has been the expansion of DAB into car radios. Not that long ago, few cars—perhaps only the most expensive vehicles—had a DAB radio installed, but quite a number of cars now have one. When drivers switch to digital radio, they will find a selection of stations, including the national radio stations and almost certainly the syndicated regional stations, but some commercial radio stations that are actually not that small, such as Breeze FM in my constituency, are not on DAB. That will lead to people either migrating to consolidated media services, reducing choice and diversity, or sticking with FM. I suspect, however, that there will be a move in the long run to want to consider when radio could be switched over.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** My hon. Friend makes a good point about small community radio stations that are on FM, rather than DAB. Vale Radio in my constituency has exactly that problem. It covers the Vale of York and the Vale of Pickering, but it cannot currently get on DAB because of the costs and the licensing regime. The Bill is intended to help such organisations.

**Kevin Foster:** I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the whole purpose of the Bill, and we can discuss the current regulatory system further on Third Reading. If the Bill does not survive today, or if it gets talked out, the national and local multiplexes will continue, which is fine for the largest radio operators because it suits their needs. The small community radio stations would take the hit and ultimately have fewer users. There would be less choice and diversity, and we would have a regulatory system that just does not reflect advancing technology.

I made the point on Second Reading that in the 1960s the outcome of an outdated attitude to broadcasting regulation was ships sitting just off our shores. The reality of not passing the Bill would be more community radio stations moving on to the internet. If we wanted to, my hon. Friend and I could set up an internet radio station in our office and start broadcasting. I am not sure how many people would want to listen—I see some nods of assent—but that is how technology is moving.

We can broadcast over the internet, but it does not have the ease of access of traditional radio broadcasting mediums. Yes, it is there and, yes, it is growing—the

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tech-savvy probably have apps on their phones so that they can listen—but it is not as easy as carrying around a simple, portable digital radio that is possibly smaller than a laptop, an iPad or a smartphone. That is why it is so important that we look to progress and look to pass the Bill unamended. There needs to be flexibility for the future. I would not want to set up restrictions in the Bill for well-intentioned reasons and find that, in a year or two's time, we are stunting growth and development in a rapidly moving technology.

Let me be blunt. If we told our forefathers 30 or 40 years ago that a radio broadcasting system could be run off a laptop this big, they would have sat there in amazement. A broadcasting station then was a large room with a whacking great tower on it.

**Jo Churchill:** They might also have asked what a laptop is.

**Kevin Foster:** Yes, and that is the way technology is moving on. The Bill needs to be flexible, but it also needs to be adaptable because there are so many different locations. The Bill does not replicate the BBC's guarantee of carriage on local and national multiplexes. The guarantee was relevant for the time and for the scale of those operations. I am loth to set a specific requirement in every single licence to guarantee community access, but it is almost certain that Ofcom, when looking at licence applications, will want to consider how it keeps diversity on a particular multiplex or how it gives opportunity. The evidence is that community radio stations have benefited fairly well from the small-scale trials. If we start to have a reservation or price controls—that is another thing we could consider—Parliament would get into odd arguments about exactly where we set those price controls in particular areas. The nature of small-scale multiplexes means that there will be lots more of them, which will inevitably bring down some broadcast costs.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Kevin Foster:** Briefly, but I will then make some progress towards a conclusion.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** There has to be an incentive for multiplex owners to invest in technology and equipment. Does this require significant investment? What rate of return can they expect? Obviously we need to create an incentive for such equipment to be established.

**Kevin Foster:** The Bill gives permission for some of these multiplexes to be run not for profit, effectively as community multiplexes, and there is some evidence that other operators—I gave the example of a university or a local authority—might wish to provide the infrastructure. I make it clear that we do not want to get into the game of local authorities running radio stations—that is not a council's job. We could run the infrastructure under this licence for not-for-profit purposes, but a commercial station that makes a profit could be carried. The key issue is that, at the moment, someone can go from running an internet radio station in their bedroom to running a small-scale FM operation, and then build up their business and their listeners to become a more

significant company. Under current regulations, someone wanting to go on to the digital system in some areas needs to be turning over £1 million a year to be able to pay the broadcast fees as part of that turnover. That is why this Bill is so important.

I am conscious of time, so I will wind up. I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills to withdraw her amendment for the reasons that I have outlined. I also urge the Community Media Association and groups such as Radiocentre, which have been active in contacting Members, which I welcome, to work with the Government through the consultation to produce the best outcome that can deliver the objectives that I have outlined. This Bill is about opening up an opportunity, giving community stations a chance to go digital and helping stimulate creativity as we have seen in the 10 trial areas. I will say more on Third Reading, but, for now, I hope that my hon. Friend has received the assurance that she needs and will withdraw her amendment.

**Wendy Morton:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his explanation. He has gone a long way to reassure me by explaining the work of the trials. I see this as the start of the process. For that reason and for the need to keep this Bill flexible, I will, with the leave of the House, withdraw my amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

*Third Reading*

1.26 pm

**Kevin Foster:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank hon. Members for their contributions today and those who served on the Bill Committee. I do not intend to detain the House hugely on Third Reading, but I do want to set out the wider purposes of this Bill and why I believe that it is right that it now receives its final approval from this House today.

The whole purpose of the Bill is to tackle the hole that exists in the broadcasting legislation. There are three levels of radio: national, regional/larger local, and community. At the moment, three of them exist on the analogue frequencies, and two on the digital frequencies. That is why it is now important to create an opportunity for community stations to go on to digital.

I am very clear that this Bill is not about forcing any station to go on to a digital platform if they wish to stay on the analogue platform. Obviously, during the passage of this Bill through the House, we have had comments about future moves to have a switchover in the same way that we had with television some years ago, but that is not the intention of this Bill and those requirements are not in this Bill.

I also want to be clear that we do need to keep flexibility in this Bill to allow the hundreds of different circumstances to be taken into account during the issue of individual licences. It would clearly be rather bizarre to say—we do not do this in any other community licence—that what might be an appropriate restriction in terms of a community licence to cover, say, Croydon, which is almost the size of Coventry but which is an individual community in London, should be the same as the requirement as that in, say, Whitehaven in Cumbria, which was the very first place to switch over to digital TV. Clearly, it would not be appropriate to put in the

same sort of restrictions in that community that we might think would be sensible and reasonable for a large suburban part of London.

It is also worth noting the demand that exists. One point that has been made a few times during the passage of this Bill is whether there is a demand for such legislation. It is all very well to sit here and legislate and say that we should have it, but we must consider whether there is the demand. What we see from the 10 small-scale trials is that the system is simple to operate, that there is a demand and that new choices are created.

**Craig Whittaker:** On the digital technology that my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) mentioned earlier, we really struggle with reception in Calder Valley, so for community and small radio stations to go digital, surely we have to have the technology in place first.

**Kevin Foster:** My hon. Friend is right. The thing is, the technology exists for small-scale broadcasting and, bluntly, if the transition equipment is popped on to the top of a tall building, it takes out the cost of maintaining a large radio mast, as we might think of in a traditional broadcasting system. The technology exists, but the ability to license it properly does not.

As this was mentioned on Second Reading, I should be clear that if we do not get on and legislate, the trial stations in the 10 areas will ultimately end up closing. A trial system is not an appropriate way to regulate broadcasting in the long term. Yes, that system was used to create the 10 trial areas—I think we all supported the trial and, certainly according to the feedback from the MPs in those areas, it has gone down very well—but that cannot go on forever and must be brought to an end.

**Lyn Brown:** I completely and utterly agree with that sentiment.

**Kevin Foster:** I thank the hon. Lady for that statement. Sometimes in this Chamber we exchange comments that are not quite so supportive of each other's ideas or suggestions, so that intervention is absolutely welcome. I am sure that the many diverse communities in east London are, in reality, not going to go on to a London-wide multiplex—they just cannot do that—but the Bill will mean that they can get small-scale licences and provide competition to larger-scale operations, as well as unique services and individual choice.

**Lyn Brown:** Which is why I am so supportive of it.

**Kevin Foster:** I am absolutely delighted to hear how supportive of the Bill the hon. Lady is. I am pleased to say to her that I suspect we will be moving on to the Third Reading vote in the not-too-distant future; I hope she will be shouting a nice loud “Aye” in her usual style.

**Lyn Brown:** I will indeed.

**Kevin Foster:** It is important to explore, briefly, some of the issues that were picked up by the Community Media Association and explored a bit in Committee, particularly the issue of whether someone could own more than one small-scale multiplex and the suggestion mentioned by the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan). If we restricted it so that organisations could

have only one, there could be some bizarre outcomes in, for example, areas where more than one multiplex would be needed to cover a small community. I suspect that a restriction to one in London might be sensible, but if the British Forces Broadcasting Service was restricted to one, would that be done on the basis of its individual stations or the idea that it is one organisation? It would clearly be sensible to allow the BFBS to own several small-scale radio multiplexes at particular military bases throughout the country, and to restrict it to one would be strange.

I suspect that, were we to put in such a statutory restriction, we could see bizarre things happen, such as a community operation having individual licence holders and trying to structure things to allow them to get around the restriction. It is appropriate that we consider—particularly as part of the consultation, although I would be interested to hear the Minister's thoughts as well—how we can prevent the provisions from being used by large-scale operators to avoid the national and local multiplex systems. Were the Bill too strict, though, we would end up with some really quite bizarre outcomes that were never intended. That is why the Bill as it is, unamended, is right. I hope that when it heads to the other place their lordships will recognise that there is a specific reason why we have not put that restriction into the Bill. If we ever decide to go for a digital switchover in future, we need to provide an option for companies that are not large-scale media conglomerates but have more than one station. I therefore hope that Members will support the Bill's Third Reading.

As I said on Second Reading, I looked for the list of community radio stations that would be given their first real chance to go on to DAB by the Bill. There are so many of them and there is such wide diversity, in communities that in some cases probably struggle to get their voice heard. I therefore hope that they will see the Bill receiving its Third Reading today as encouragement to continue what they are doing and as a real positive for the future. That is why I am proud to have brought this Bill to the Floor of the House and proud to have got it through the Bill Committee, and I hope that the House will agree to give it its Third Reading and send it on its way.

1.34 pm

**Jo Churchill:** I shall be short and very pithy to give my fellow Members a chance to speak and so that we can move the business on. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) for giving an expansive reason why he did not think my amendment would provide any greater clarity. I have followed the Bill with interest, and I should like to think that there is space for community radio to have its full place and to allow British forces radio, as he said, and certain ethnic music stations to have their places within their communities to give them their voices. There is an enthusiasm for small and independent commercial stations to broadcast on DAB, and I hope that cost will not stop them doing so. I hope that my hon. Friend's Bill will enable such broadcasting to happen, and he has my support.

1.35 pm

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I rise to support the Bill on Third Reading and to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay

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(Kevin Foster) on introducing it. It seems to be very much on the cusp of important new developments in the world of digital radio in helping to open up the market to community radio stations that want to broadcast on DAB.

I particularly want to refer to a community radio station that broadcasts to my constituency—Black Country Radio—because, as my hon. Friend may know, it is one of the smaller radio stations that has been taking part in the local DAB trial. It speaks very positively of the trial's benefits and tells me that broadcasting over DAB before the trial would have cost it thousands of pounds and been unaffordable. Black Country Radio is beginning to position itself as a vital source of local community news for the Black country, by covering local politics and community events. I am hopeful that when the Bill gets its Third Reading today and has passed through the other place, the trial will be extended, allowing Black Country Radio to continue to extend its reach as an effective local community radio station. I think that my hon. Friend's Bill will be a major contributory factor in enhancing Black Country Radio's offer.

As my hon. Friend said, digital radio is a large growth market, and local radio stations that want to tap into that market have proliferated. The Bill will be an effective mechanism to stimulate that market. In the second quarter of 2016, we saw a large set of digital stations posting results for the first time that show that digital radio listening had reached a new high of 45.3%. We have seen considerable annual growth in the audiences for digital radio. We have seen growth of about 5.4% over the past year.

The Bill will allow smaller radio stations to take full advantage of the growth in the sector. I have already cited the example of Black Country Radio. It will bring growth and prosperity to small radio stations, and that will in turn benefit local communities.

The aim of the Bill, as ably articulated by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay, is to create a system of radio multiplexes: national multiplexes for UK-wide transmission; local radio multiplexes for county level transmission; and small-scale radio multiplexes for sub-county level transmission. This three-tier system with a lighter touch regulatory framework will open up the market and bring the benefits to which I alluded earlier regarding the deregulation of the industry.

The Bill includes a provision that excludes larger radio stations, such as the BBC, that have existing licences in national or local radio multiplex services from holding a small-scale multiplex licence, helping to ensure that the new multiplex sites will not be abused by larger radio stations and that they can be used for the purpose for which they were intended—to let smaller radio stations benefit from using the DAB format.

Again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on steering the Bill through to Third Reading. It is an important modernisation of the existing licensing regime that will take into account the different needs of local radio stations, facilitating the creation of a richer market and providing the consumer with a better broadcasting experience. I think we would all agree that the Broadcasting Act 1996 has failed to keep pace with recent technological developments and market changes. The Bill is an important contribution to the modernisation of digital radio, and I very much support it.

1.41 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) on bringing the legislation forward, and on his deep understanding of some of the technologies that lie behind the fantastic evolution in our broadcasting abilities. I very much support the Bill, particularly as my hon. Friend said that it will create more competition for commercial operators in a marketplace that can be dominated by quite large national chains, even though they may present themselves as local operators. Small commercial operators competing for revenue and advertising with larger stations or networks can only be good for the opportunities of local people, businesspeople and community operators.

Vale Radio in my constituency is an excellent community operator with a deep understanding of the local area. It is run by local people, who regularly do slots such as "A day in the life of an MP". In fact, they came to Westminster only last year to see what happens in a typical MP's day. That local connection is incredibly important. Of course, these smaller operators need more affordable access, which is what the Bill is about. It will break down the larger DAB areas into chunks that are about 60% smaller than typical schemes available now. That inevitably means better, cheaper accessibility with bandwidth and spectrum put aside specifically for small commercial operators and community stations.

As my hon. Friends have mentioned, the equipment, including the multiplexes themselves, can be provided for not-for-profit operators, which again will mean better access at a lower cost that is more suitable for community operators. Community operators may be niche channels, but they very much relate to the local area with the content and local insights of their programmes. There is clearly demand for such channels and for this spectrum. I believe that there are 444 small commercial stations or community operators that would like to get on to DAB, but have no access at the moment. DAB is a growing part of the broadcasting market. Some 45% of consumers today listen on digital, and that figure will grow to 50% by the end of the year. Digital radio is certainly significant in providing access to the market, and it is how people will listen to radio in the future.

I would like to question my hon. Friend and the Minister about the number of licences multiplex owners can own. I referred in an intervention earlier to the need to make sure we do not end up in a monopolistic situation, with a media company owning lots of these multiplexes and having control over pricing. It is vital that there is a restriction on the number of multiplexes that one licence holder can hold. At the same time, of course, we need to balance that with the need for investment—clearly, there is investment in the technologies and the equipment and in the staffing—to make sure the Bill delivers a solution that sees the roll-out of multiplexes, while making sure community operators and small commercial stations get access at the right price.

**Kevin Foster:** I will keep this intervention fairly short because I am conscious that the Front Benchers will wish to say something. Perhaps I can reassure my hon. Friend. If he looks at clause 1(4)(b), he will see that Ofcom would be able to

"make provision as to eligibility to hold a small-scale radio multiplex licence, including provision disqualifying persons who have an interest in a national or local radio multiplex service".

That means that if it felt a monopoly was emerging in an area, it could use its powers. However, this is probably one more issue for detailed consultation and for the order, rather than for the Bill itself.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** Yes, my hon. Friend makes a good point. Perhaps monopoly is too strong a word. Nevertheless, we could get into a situation with a bit of a hinterland, where the operator of these multiplex licences has too strong a control, particularly in a given area. Putting some protections in place would make sure that affordability of access remained, while retaining an incentive for a commercial operator—these may well be commercial operators rather than not-for-profit operators—to invest.

I would like to congratulate the Department on its foresight in starting the trial in 2014 and on putting the time and investment into this new technology, which has led to its potential roll-out and created a new opportunity for a lot of commercial stations and community operators.

To conclude, I congratulate my hon. Friend again on the deep understanding he has shown of the process of Parliament in getting this far—he is nearly over the finishing line—and on his understanding of the technology. His work will help many operators and many communities.

1.47 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): My remarks will also be fairly brief, since we discussed the Bill quite extensively in Committee the other day, and we have had very good debates today on Report and Third Reading. I also know that the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) and the Government are as keen as the Opposition are to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) by 2 o'clock, so my remarks will not be overly extensive.

I congratulated the hon. Gentleman in Committee on bringing the Bill forward, and I do so again today. I also congratulate him on bringing it this far in its parliamentary journey. He said earlier that, had the amendments been accepted, there would have been no chance to do anything about that later. Of course, that is not technically correct, because his Bill now makes its way down to the other end of the building, where the Lords might well have a different view about these things and might want to take out something that we had put in at this end of the building. Nevertheless, similar amendments were discussed, and it will now be for the other place to decide about the reassurances that the hon. Gentleman gave on the amendments, which were subsequently withdrawn.

As I say, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the Bill. It is a non-controversial, handout Bill from the Government, but he still had to carry it effectively through its parliamentary stages, and he has indeed done that. However, it might not be unfair to observe that there is a Government Bill in Committee in the other place right now—the Digital Economy Bill—that this proposal may well have been a suitable part of had it been ready in time.

We support this Bill. We championed community radio while we were in government, introducing the Community Radio Order 2004, which established the community radio fund. The Bill continues that work by updating the infrastructure available to community radio stations and facilitating affordable access to digital frequencies. I am sure that most Members, as we heard particularly

on Second Reading, have had a community radio station in their own constituency in mind throughout these debates. Of course I, like others, pay tribute to my local community radio station, Radio Cardiff. Community radio stations are undoubtedly agents for social good. They involve volunteers, they engage listeners, and they contribute to social cohesion. Any measure that supports these stations in extending their reach and expanding their impact is very welcome.

Labour Members welcome the Bill and support its Third Reading. I hope that we are sending it on its way to a bright future in the other place and, without too much further delay, into law so that it can have the impact that it undoubtedly will have at a local level in our constituencies.

1.50 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Rob Wilson):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak on this important occasion. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster)—this is the first opportunity I have had to do so—on getting this Bill through to Third Reading. He has done an extremely detailed and thorough job on it, and it is a great credit to him that it looks as though it is going to pass into law—without taking anything for granted in the other place, of course.

The Government support this Bill because it will enable the creation of an appropriate and low-cost licensing regime for the transmission of digital radio on a small scale. It will give small commercial and community stations a platform to broadcast on digital, which is currently beyond their reach due to the costs and constraints of the existing statutory regime. The detail of how the new licensing regime should operate will obviously be subject to full consultation, as we have heard.

I thank my hon. Friends, and all hon. Members, for their very thoughtful contributions to this debate and the previous debates—in particular, my hon. Friends the Members for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker), and for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris).

I will quickly try to deal with some of the issues that have been raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds asked about access for small community radio stations. I assure her that the aim is to provide a means for all small stations, especially community stations, to go digital. The Bill allows us to put in a protection to reserve capacity and exclude large operators. However this is done, it needs a very flexible approach.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton asked a similar question. I can confirm that the Bill already gives Ofcom the power to exclude holders of existing local and national multiplex licence holders from taking licences in small-scale digital radio multiplexes. This will prevent large groups, particularly large media organisations that operate digital radio multiplexes on a larger scale, from holding small radio multiplexes. That will have the benefit of keeping down the cost of carriage on small-scale multiplexes because they will not be open to existing large-scale commercial radio multiplex operators.

The hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) asked why this measure is not in the Digital Economy Bill.

[Mr Rob Wilson]

That has been dealt with before by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Digital and Culture, who said that the DCMS needed to see the conclusions of the Ofcom trials before we moved to legislation. Ofcom did not publish that evaluation until September 2016, which was several months after the introduction of the Digital Economy Bill. I think the hon. Gentleman knew that anyway, but we will leave it at that.

Listeners have repeatedly said how important local radio is to them. Research commissioned by Ofcom in 2015 indicates that 45% of listeners to local commercial radio value the local news it provides, and 35% value it for local travel and weather information. It is clear that radio remains a very popular medium, with industry figures indicating that 90% of the adult population listens to the radio each week and that overall listening to radio remains strong, with more than 1 billion hours being consumed by adults in the UK each week.

Although the popularity of radio as measured by its reach and audience hours has been stable over recent years, radio is changing. Listening on analogue is falling back, while DAB listening on digital platforms continues to grow steadily. Digital radio's share of listening is 45.5%, as I think my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay said, and almost 60% of households own a DAB radio.

The radio industry expects that long-term shift in listening habits to continue, which means that digital will overtake analogue as the default listening mode in the near future. One of the drivers—almost literally—of the change is new cars. According to the Society of Motor Manufacturers & Traders, around 85% of new cars sold have DAB radios installed as standard. According to Digital Radio UK, a quarter of all in-car listening is digital, and it is growing at 39% a year.

I endorse what my hon. Friends have said about the important role played by local radio stations. Small commercial and community radio stations continue to provide an important means of informing and engaging with communities, as well as providing entertaining, popular and lively programming. The Government recognise the importance of smaller stations to their local communities, and we have been aware for some time of the desire for small commercial and community radio stations to have a route to broadcast on a digital platform that meets their needs. The objective behind the Bill is to give smaller stations the ability to broadcast on digital.

A key success of the small-scale multiplex trial set up by Ofcom has been the strong support from smaller stations, including community radio, and the way in which they have all worked together. The majority of trial small-scale multiplexes are full or nearly full. The development of a layer of small-scale multiplexes will provide the answer, in most cases, to the question of how to provide the 400 small commercial and community radio stations that are transmitting to their local areas on FM or medium wave with the opportunity to broadcast cost-effectively on a digital platform. The development of a tier of small-scale DAB networks across the country could also attract new entrants to launch radio services, some of which have successful programme formats from prior experience of broadcasting via the internet.

Overall, we think that the development is likely to result in a wider selection of stations and programme content for listeners. I think we all agree that that can only be a really positive thing. It will create new audiences for advertisers and sponsors, facilitating growth in the sector. The Government welcome the Bill and support it as it moves to the other place. The Bill has had a strong airing in this place and we hope that the other place will give it a fair wind, given its limited but extremely targeted scope, the cross-party support—including all hon. Members here today—and the reassurances that have been given by me and my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay today.

1.58 pm

**Kevin Foster:** With the leave of the House, I want to thank the Members who have spoken and express my gratitude for the support that the Bill has just received from the Government. It is a welcome measure that will make a difference to many communities across the country, and I am pleased that it will go to the House of Lords with cross-party support, not least given the balance between the parties in the other place. The Bill will have an impact across the whole of the United Kingdom. The previous Bill that we discussed extended to England and Wales, but this Bill will cover the whole of the UK. It will bring the benefits of listening, creativity, diversity and, ultimately, jobs to all parts of the United Kingdom.

I am conscious that time is marching on, and there is another Bill that I am keen to discuss in a minute; I want to make some supportive remarks on it. I thank all Members who have spoken.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

## Child Poverty in the UK (Target for Reduction) Bill

2 pm

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to debate my Bill on the Floor of the House. The Bill seeks to establish a target for the reduction of child poverty, because it is a fundamental principle of fairness that every child should have the best start in life.

A great privilege of serving in Parliament is the broad range of people that we get the opportunity to meet. Kelly Louise, a remarkable 10-year-old, stands out as someone who bravely shared her experiences of growing up in poverty. She spoke about the stresses that poverty imposed on her family, how that affected her and the coping mechanisms that she used to make life livable. She conveyed how poverty can shape so much of a young person's life, from what someone wears to school or the home they return to. When we see poverty through the lens of children, the solutions become a little clearer and more urgent. That is why I serve in Parliament: to ensure that where someone is born is no barrier to their future.

**Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware of the figures that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation issued today, indicating that whereas for most of the population poverty will be decreasing by 2021, for children it will increase?

**Dan Jarvis**: My hon. Friend speaks with great authority on these matters. I am aware of the figures and will refer to them later in my speech, but I am grateful for her intervention.

I am sure that all of us in this House serve in Parliament to ensure that where someone grows up does not determine where they end up. As the Member of Parliament for Barnsley Central, it is a huge privilege to work to ensure that children who grow up in my constituency get the same life opportunities as those in other more affluent parts of the country.

I will make the case today that our shared duty means that in 2017 no child in Britain should have to grow up in poverty, and I will set out some of the challenges facing those children and their families. If we are going to take the steps required to ensure that poverty will no longer be an everyday reality for millions of children in Britain, we must recognise the realities of modern poverty and develop co-ordinated, prioritised solutions across Government, building partnerships with communities, employers and the devolved Administrations.

As in life, if someone wants to achieve something in Government, it is useful to set a target: a starting point on which a renewed effort can be built. The measures in that target and the policies required to achieve it should rightly be debated at length, but my Bill intends to establish the principle rather than to be prescriptive. In doing so, I defer to the advice of the House of Commons Library, which notes:

“Targets let those responsible for delivery know what needs to happen, so that they can plan, monitor and deliver”.

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that if someone does not meet their targets, they should change their actions, not their targets?

**Dan Jarvis**: My hon. Friend speaks with real authority on this matter, which I know is very important to her personally. I agree with her, and let us be clear: this House has previously united behind that principle, most notably in enacting the Child Poverty Act 2010.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing this important Bill. He is right to emphasise the importance of targets, and we should note the fact that targets work. Labour set its targets to reduce child poverty by a quarter by 2005 and by half by 2010. Does he agree that when we began to see progress falling back, adjusting action was able to be taken, which meant that more than 1 million children were removed from poverty under Labour?

**Dan Jarvis**: My hon. Friend speaks with huge knowledge, experience and authority, and she is absolutely right. Today's debate represents an opportunity for all of us in this place to send out a clear statement of intent that our goal is that no child should have to grow up in poverty, and that we will hold ourselves accountable and measure progress through the target that we seek to set.

Why is it so urgent that we set a target? The Resolution Foundation highlights falling living standards among the least well-off, as a combination of rising inflation, welfare cuts and lower pay increases hits. It warns that for the poorest, this Parliament will be the worst for living standards since records began and the worst for inequality since the 1980s.

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that a growing problem in our country is poverty among children whose parents are working? That is a real fear for many people.

**Dan Jarvis**: I do agree, and my hon. Friend has anticipated some of the remarks that I will come to shortly. I am grateful to her for the intervention.

Having referred to the Resolution Foundation report, I would also like briefly to mention a landmark report by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. It highlights what it describes as the “stark inequalities” between children of different backgrounds and the effect of poverty in worsening children's health.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to the importance of having a target or targets for child poverty. I agree with him about the impact of the targets that Tony Blair set in 1999. Does he agree that one reason why we are going backwards now is that Governments since 2010 have abolished those targets?

**Dan Jarvis**: My right hon. Friend speaks with experience of implementing a target in government, and I know that we are all grateful for the work that he and many others did. He is absolutely right. The reality is that if any Government were serious about reducing the number of children who grow up in poverty, they would seek to set themselves a target. That is the very essence of what this debate is all about.

[Dan Jarvis]

The figures show that every Member of Parliament serves a considerable number of constituents who are growing up in poverty, so collectively we should and will be aware of the many challenges faced by families throughout the country. Times are hard, and for many money is short. In Britain today, an average of nine children in a classroom of 30 are growing up in poverty. For those 4 million children, it can mean living in a cold and cramped home, falling behind in school, and suffering ill health later in life. Today, we have an opportunity to make a clear commitment to do right by those children, because feelings of concern and insecurity about our future direction as a country are becoming increasingly commonplace. That is not just about the Brexit debate; it extends to the fundamental question of what we are prepared to tolerate as a society.

Ipsos MORI regularly surveys the public to ask about the top issues facing Britain. One in five people now highlight poverty as one of the biggest challenges facing our country. The anxiety about it has increased significantly in recent times and now stands at the highest level since the question was first asked in 1997. In these uncertain times, we face a defining challenge of providing greater security to families, and calling time on child poverty must be fundamental to that. The Institute for Fiscal Studies projects that without a change in approach, the level of relative child poverty will increase by 50% by 2020. The reality may actually be starker, because greater economic uncertainty, rising costs and lower pay growth mean that the IFS concludes that the outlook for poverty is almost certainly worse. That is a wake-up call to a looming crisis, because ever-increasing child poverty is not inevitable. It is a result of political choices. We have seen it before, when child poverty rose sharply in the 1980s and peaked in the late 1990s before falling very significantly.

The previous Labour Government showed us how that could be achieved by delivering the biggest improvement of any EU nation and lifting 1 million children out of poverty. It did not happen by accident. The Government set themselves a target and made achieving it a priority, through policies such as investment in higher quality early years education; a fourfold expansion in childcare and Sure Start centres; an expansion in support for families so that they could enjoy greater control over their lives and greater security in their finances; the tax credit system; and the doubling of the amount of maternity leave being taken.

All of that was supported by the child poverty unit, which parliamentary questions reveal the Government have now quietly disbanded. That cross-departmental unit, co-sponsored by the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Treasury, held a special status. Its existence was a recognition that action against child poverty required a cross-Government approach. Its closure risks giving the impression that tackling child poverty has been downgraded. Setting a target can help to put that right. It would demonstrate a seriousness of purpose and determination to stop more children living in poverty. We have a duty to this generation to make progress on addressing child poverty once again.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentioned last week's report from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.

Is he aware that it found that we have one of the worst levels of infant mortality in western Europe and that eliminating child poverty would save the lives of 1,400 children under 15 years old every year?

**Dan Jarvis:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, not only for that incredibly important point, but for her unstinting support throughout this process. That is a shocking statistic and one that brings shame on our country. Collectively we have to strive to do much better. The Bill is about providing an opportunity for the Government and all of us to seek to do much better.

**Stephen Timms:** I wonder whether my hon. Friend has seen the analysis from the End Child Poverty coalition showing that since 2010 the cost of living has gone up by 19%, the state pension by 22%, but child benefit by just 2%. Is that not a large part of the problem?

**Dan Jarvis:** My right hon. Friend puts his finger on the nub of the problem. Many families, including, as we have heard, those in work, are increasingly struggling to make ends meet. This debate is about how we can provide support to those families.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): As someone who grew up in a family rich in love but not in money, I welcome the hon. Gentleman bringing the Bill to the Floor of the House. I sometimes comment that we hear from Labour anger but no alternatives, so it is welcome to see solid proposals backing up his speech.

**Dan Jarvis:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that helpful intervention, and I hope that in just a moment he will hear from me a few more alternative proposals.

A target would provide a strong foundation for a wider approach matching the complexity of the causes of poverty today. I will briefly set out the proposals in my Bill. It asks the Government to consult the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission to decide the date by which the target should be met. It is not prescriptive about all the measures the target should include. Rather, it would require the Secretary of State to bring forward a proposal which would allow for a range of measures to be considered, including the Government's favoured indicators—of children living in workless households and educational attainment at age 16.

I am clear, however, that reference should be made to the four established measures of poverty based on income, because that is a central factor in meeting children's needs. These income measures have enjoyed cross-party support and their recording was placed on a statutory footing by the coalition. Of course, as the hon. Gentleman just alluded to, money is not everything, but that does not mean that it is nothing, and a target should recognise that.

In order to ensure accountability, the Bill would require the Government to lay before Parliament a child poverty strategy setting out the measures they will take to meet the target.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend has mentioned a target and a strategy. Does he agree that the Government could learn from the Welsh Labour

Government, who, in 2011, acknowledged the need for a strategy to tackle child poverty and identified five key areas for improvement, and are now on the way to achieving their goals?

**Dan Jarvis:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A great deal of extremely constructive work is being done, not only in Wales but in Scotland and other parts of Britain. I think that, collectively, we all have a responsibility and a duty to learn from that work, and spread best practice throughout the country.

I was talking about accountability. The Bill would require the Government to lay before Parliament a strategy setting out the measures that they will take to meet the target and, crucially, to report on progress towards meeting it. Now is the time to make an unambiguous commitment to reducing child poverty, and to measure our progress by setting a target. The social and economic costs of failure are too great to risk. A target will also help to co-ordinate an approach across Government: poverty reduction should be incorporated in strategies that are being developed on social justice, housing and industrial policy.

**Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con):** The issue of child poverty affects Members on both sides of the House. I welcome the Bill, and congratulate the hon. Gentleman on introducing it. Does he acknowledge that poverty involves many other factors as well as income? Rural poverty, for instance, affects many children throughout the country.

**Dan Jarvis:** The hon. Lady is right. So far I have been outlining the moral case for action on poverty, but I think there is a sound economic case for it as well. We should recognise that that focus is necessary if we are to build an economy that works for everyone. Action on child poverty today can strengthen our economy, improve productivity, and reduce pressures on the public purse. Both the International Monetary Fund and the OECD have emphasised that poverty acts as a drag on economic growth. Reducing poverty will strengthen our economy, not least because the less well-off households spend more of the money that they receive than those that are better off.

When we hear about those who are, as Prime Minister described them, just about managing, we must all seek to understand the reality of those people's lives. Many families are just one bill away from finding themselves struggling. Those families have been feeling the squeeze for years: 50% of households have received no meaningful pay increase since 2005. Over the last decade, real earnings have fallen by more than 10%, which, as the TUC has pointed out, leaves the United Kingdom at the bottom of a league table of OECD nations, equal only with Greece. This has been the longest pay squeeze for more than a century.

Poverty also increases demand on the public purse. It is responsible for £1 in every £5 of public spending. To put it simply, poverty will make it even harder to balance the books in the future.

**Lyn Brown:** Poverty is not just about "now". Poverty among children creates conditions in which they will not thrive in the future, and in the future it will cost us

more to deal with the poverty that our children are experiencing today. Food, education, prosperity and health all involve costs.

**Dan Jarvis:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need to invest in our future as a country.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates, on the basis of its research, that the annual cost of poverty to the public purse comes to £78 billion. That is why it is penny wise but pound foolish to cut investment in early years intervention.

**Kevin Foster:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dan Jarvis:** I shall make a bit of progress, if I may.

I note with some concern that House of Commons Library analysis shows that investment in Sure Start children's centres has halved since 2010. As a result, more than 300 local centres have closed. The social challenges of poverty—gaps between the richest and the rest of our society in our schools, and poor health—come with economic costs.

As well as redirecting public spending, poverty makes it harder to achieve the productivity gains that workers and the economy desperately need. This matters because for too many families work no longer pays. Two thirds of children in poverty grow up in a home where at least one parent works. While the Government rightly highlight the role that work can play in moving people out of poverty, taking a comprehensive approach requires action to support those trapped on low incomes, so that they can progress into better paid jobs. Four in five of those who enter low-paid work remain low paid 10 years later.

The Government's upcoming industrial strategy can take two steps to support those workers. It should feature a plan to support low wage industries, and Government can also play a role by bringing together employers and trade unions to focus on raising productivity, which is the key to increasing pay. Localised pay commissions could also play a role in areas dominated by low pay. By taking action now on low pay, we can recognise the realities of the modern world of work for so many, and in doing so reduce child poverty.

There is vital work under way across the country to support families who have hit hard times. In my Barnsley constituency, the local anti-poverty board, led by Councillor Jenny Platts, brings together local partners to support residents. They identify those families most in need, then target resources to provide debt advice, information on fuel poverty initiatives and healthy eating programmes. Despite that local effort, more than one in four children in Barnsley grow up in poverty, so today I stand here to give a voice to those 5,114 children.

I want to take this opportunity to place on record my thanks to the Child Poverty Action Group, which has long campaigned on this issue. I am very proud to have its support for my Bill. I also thank the parliamentary Clerks and the many stakeholders who have lent support through this process.

**Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab):** My hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful speech. Will he join me in also welcoming the work of anti-poverty charities such as Magic Breakfast, which is providing primary school breakfast clubs to tackle educational disadvantage and childhood poverty? However, does he agree that we

[*Wes Streeting*]

should not need charity to make sure that children are well fed or well clothed or that families have the right level of income? These are structural issues in our economy, and that is why it is vital that the Government commit not only to a target, but to the necessary action to rebalance our economy in a fairer way.

**Dan Jarvis:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I am sure that all of us on this side of the House, and I hope many on the other side, will absolutely agree.

This neatly takes me to the nub of the issue. I brought this Bill forward because millions of children in Britain need real change. Poverty destroys childhoods and limits futures. Ending that burning injustice should be a defining mission for the Government.

A century ago, Joseph Rowntree demanded action on poverty. He made the case to a Liberal Government that the prevalence of poverty in Britain would undermine its continued presence as a world power. That sense of national purpose in tackling poverty was also witnessed most memorably during our country's darkest hours. In 1942, in the middle of a world war, Winston Churchill's coalition Government published the Beveridge report. It defined a national mission that would follow in peacetime under Clement Attlee. Today, at a moment of greater uncertainty for our country than at any time since, ending poverty once again deserves to be an unrelenting effort. Brexit should not be used as an excuse for inaction; instead it should provide the reason for a new approach. Britain's place in the world of tomorrow will be brighter if we focus on child poverty today. Solving this historical problem should be part of a modern national mission.

Our success as a country will increasingly require us to meet our duty to those who are left behind; to provide security, opportunity and hope to those who need it most; and to end poverty so that every child can realise their potential. That has to be our ambition. It should be a challenge that unites us all, so let us set ourselves that target once more.

2.24 pm

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Time is very tight, so I will speak for only a short time. I warmly welcome this important Bill. Prior to entering this House, I was part of a coalition of well over 100 organisations that came together in the End Child Poverty campaign to press for the legislation that was eventually passed with cross-party support and became the Child Poverty Act 2010. As my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) said, the Act set out targets for the reduction of child poverty across four measures—not just one target, but a range. More importantly, however, it also highlighted the need for cross-Government and cross-civil society strategies to address all the dimensions of poverty: housing, education, employment, parenting, and child wellbeing.

Between 1997 and 2010, as Labour set about reducing child poverty and set targets for doing so, we saw that targets are the most powerful tool we have for driving progress and measuring and taking action when progress falters. It is right that the Government continue to

emphasise the importance of addressing poverty with their new measures, but when two thirds of children in poverty grow up in families where someone is in paid work, a target that simply looks at worklessness misses one of the key and perhaps most disgraceful aspects of child poverty today: no working parent should be struggling to provide and care for their children. That shames our country. It shames a country as rich as ours that one in four children continues to grow up poor.

I know that there is a consensus right around the House on the importance of the Bill that my hon. Friend has brought forward this afternoon. We need more than warm words. We need meaningful targets, established in legislation and committed to by Government, and the determination, the policies and the resources to achieve them. It can be done. It must be.

2.26 pm

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Given the time, I did debate whether to get up to speak, but I understand that the Minister would have had quite a few remarks to make anyway, which would have taken us through the remaining time.

I want to respond from the Government Benches to what was a dignified and excellent speech from the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis). As a Conservative Member, perhaps the best compliment that I can pay him is that it is pleasing to hear that sort of quality of performance from the Labour Benches at this time on a Friday. It would be nice to hear it just after 12 o'clock on a Wednesday in the six questions to pursue Labour's agenda.

It is welcome that there is a Bill before the House looking at targets for the reduction of child poverty. There are extremes in Torbay. Parts of Watcombe have high levels of child poverty, for example. I have an area that is a bit like a poor man's Sandbanks, where large numbers of wealthy retirees live, and then on the other side of the hill there is a large number of working families, particularly those who work in lower-paid industries such as tourism and the care sector. I therefore welcome this debate and some of the ideas in the Bill.

I have always thought that we should not just consider relative incomes. As the hon. Gentleman will probably agree, the situation for those on the lowest incomes may not change, but if other incomes come down, relative poverty disappears in theory. I want to ensure that those on the lowest incomes are coming up, getting more opportunities and more abilities.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): This is an important matter that affects all of us in our constituencies. For me, rural poverty is the big problem. We lack services, such as buses, and children do not get the life chances to lift themselves out of poverty. I agree with the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) that the issue is complex, because house prices and rents play an acute role in the problem.

**Kevin Foster:** I fully agree. A family in poverty in a wealthy rural community will feel a sense of social isolation, and children at school will see their friends get certain things and so on. I was going to say when I tried to intervene on the hon. Member for Barnsley Central—I understand why the intervention was not taken—that

this sort of Bill could be developed, potentially in future debates, to include provisions about educational attainment. Poverty can almost be a double hit. Someone may grow up in a deprived family, but many pupils on free school meals also do not do well in our education system. I remember a speech by the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) in which he pointed out that fewer pupils in the entire free school meals cohort attained three grade As—the passport to a top university—than the pupils at Eton did in the same year. That is why, for me—*[Interruption.]* I am aware of the time, but the Minister would have spoken to the mark anyway. I felt it was appropriate for there to be a speech on why it is not only Labour Members and Scottish National party Members who are pleased to see the Bill. A number of Conservative Back Benchers are pleased to see it, and I hope that these ideas can be taken forward at another time.

2.30 pm

*The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 11(2)).*

*Ordered,* That the debate be resumed on Friday 24 February.

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for your indulgence. My Bill to introduce Helen's law was due to be read a Second time today. Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, that has not happened. I thank the 400,000 members of the public who signed the petition, and I particularly want to recognise the families of victims who have travelled to be in Parliament today: my constituent Marie McCourt and the families of Michelle Gunshon, Jonathan Dolton, Danielle Jones, Carole Packman and Jane Harrison. The Government Whip will object to the Bill, but there is lots of support for it on both sides of the House—I think even from the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris)—and I am working with the Government. Today is not the day, but there will be a day for Helen's law.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. He knows that, from the Chair, I cannot as a matter of order do anything about the fact that his Bill has not yet been reached, but I appreciate that it is sometimes difficult for those who do not have a full grasp of parliamentary procedures, which is most people—*[Interruption.]* As hon. Members indicate, that includes a great many people who sit in this House.

The point I would like to make to the hon. Gentleman is that the fact his Bill has not been reached today is not an indication that his Bill is not held in high esteem, and I am sure that the points he would have raised in introducing his Bill would have had a lot of support in this House, for the many points in his Bill and what he is trying to achieve are very, very worthy. As he said, there will be another day. In fact, we are just coming to that now.

## **Business without Debate**

### **UNLAWFUL KILLING (RECOVERY OF REMAINS) BILL**

*Motion made,* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 February.*

### **GUARDIANSHIP (MISSING PERSONS) BILL**

*Bill read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).*

### **PROTECTION OF FAMILY HOMES (ENFORCEMENT AND PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT) BILL**

*Resumption of adjourned debate on Question (25 November),* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 24 February.*

### **CROWN TENANCIES BILL**

*Bill read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).*

### **KEW GARDENS (LEASES) BILL**

*Bill read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).*

## Jane Harrison

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

2.34 pm

**Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I am grateful to have the opportunity to lead this debate. Before I begin, I wish to thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) for championing Helen's law in this House last year, following the tireless campaigning of Marie McCourt after her daughter Helen McCourt was murdered in 1988.

This is not a speech that I would ever have wished to make. On 15 June 1995, Ms Jane Harrison disappeared following a trip to Wood Green shopping centre. She has never been seen again and her body has never been found. She was just 32 years old. Jane was murdered by her jealous and controlling partner, Kevin Doherty. Jane left behind a grieving family, devastated parents and sisters, and two young sons, then aged 14 and just 18 months old. I would like this House to acknowledge the presence of Jane's family in the Public Gallery today. I know that the Harrisons would be very grateful for the opportunity to meet the Minister in person to discuss their case.

The path to justice for the Harrison family has been long, and at times it has felt impossible. In January 2013, after 18 years of heartache and agony for the Harrison family, Kevin Doherty was finally sentenced to 12 years in jail for manslaughter. At the time of Jane's murder, Doherty was leading a double life. He was married to someone else with whom he had other children, but he was also in a relationship with Jane. Together they had a baby, and Jane also had a teenage son from a previous relationship. Doherty was a controlling partner, and had been abusive to Jane previously.

On the day of Jane's disappearance, the couple were seen arguing near her flat on Poet's Road, Islington. The last trace of Jane was at 5 pm in Wood Green shopping centre, buying items for the family's holiday to Florida. However, Doherty had already cancelled plans for the holiday without Jane knowing—because he knew that they would not be going.

Doherty claimed that he had later dropped Jane off at her mother's house and that she had never returned home to him. Jane was reported missing by Doherty the following day. It was not until 2012 that technological advances allowed for cell site analysis to be undertaken, which proved that Doherty had lied to police in 1995 when he had originally been arrested. Doherty had claimed that Jane had called the landline at the family flat twice after she had disappeared. On both occasions the calls happened in the presence of witnesses. Call analysis in 2012 showed that the calls had actually been made from Doherty's mobile phone. Furthermore, Doherty's movements in the days after Jane's disappearance did not tie in with cell site data. So what happened on 16 June 1995 remains largely unknown.

We do know that Doherty killed Jane. No one else has ever been investigated as being connected to the case. Doherty's manslaughter conviction in 2012 should have provided the Harrison family with closure, but 12 years is not enough for a man who took away a loving mother, sister and daughter from her family.

At the same time, Doherty has never expressed any remorse for Jane's murder, nor has he ever revealed the location of her body. Doherty's final act of remorseless cruelty has meant that the Harrison family have never been able to give Jane the dignity of a funeral and a resting place. The Harrisons have never had somewhere to visit together on anniversaries—somewhere to place a bunch of flowers.

Jane's parents, Phyllis and John, devoted their lives to searching for justice for their daughter and raising the two beloved sons she left behind, but they died before they were able to see Doherty finally being brought to justice. Jane's sister, Claire, told me that it was her mother's dying wish that Jane was found and laid to rest with her parents, but calculated murderer Doherty has denied the family that source of closure.

I hope that the Minister can empathise with the horror that the Harrisons felt when they discovered that Doherty, the same man that not only murdered Jane, but had concealed for 22 years where her body is, could be eligible for parole next year, six years into his 12-year sentence.

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): While we are waiting on Helen's law, there is nothing to stop the Parole Board from changing its deadlines. I would like to hear from the Minister about how he is going to act on the letter that I received in May 2016, saying that this whole matter would be reviewed by the Parole Board. When will those guidelines be updated to prevent people such as the murderer of Jane Harrison from being released on parole?

**Siobhain McDonagh:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend.

The English legal system does not require a convicted murderer to admit guilt or to reveal the location of a victim's remains before they are released on parole, after their determined tariff. It should be common sense that Kevin Doherty, like Ian Simms, the murderer of Helen McCourt, should under no circumstances be eligible to apply for parole. The law must be changed to acknowledge the suffering that Doherty has caused to the Harrison family.

Today, I wish to reaffirm my support for the campaign led in parliament by my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North. First, murderers like Doherty must be denied parole for as long as they refuse to disclose the whereabouts of their victim's remains. Secondly, Doherty, and those like him, must serve a full-life tariff, without the option of parole or release, until the murderer discloses the location, and enables the recovery, of their victim's remains. This must pertain regardless of their behaviour in prison.

Thirdly, as stipulated in Helen's law, the following rarely used common law offences must automatically be applied in murder and manslaughter trials without a body:

“preventing the burial of a body and conspiracy to prevent the burial of a body, disposing of a body, obstructing a coroner”,

as applied in the case of *Regina v. Hunter* in 1974. Those pieces of legislation would serve to properly enforce laws that are already in place but rarely used.

Currently, decisions are made by the Parole Board on a case-by-case basis, but the law needs to change so that it is, by default, on the side of victims and their families,

not on that of the murderers. Even putting aside the families' pain and grief, these murderers are dangerous. By refusing to admit their guilt, and by denying families this small act of closure, they demonstrate their culpability and their very real threat to society.

Sadly, hon. Members will know that Jane Harrison's is one of so many devastating cases in which a body has never been found. I wish to take the opportunity to remind the House of the many other murder cases in which the body has never been recovered, including that of Helen McCourt in 1988, who was just 22; Keith Bennett in 1964, who was just 12 years old; Paul Morson in 2011, who was 32 years old; Danielle Jones from Essex, who was 15; Suzanne Pilley from Scotland, in 2010; and little April Jones in 2012, who was just five years old.

The families of each of those victims have suffered untold grief, without the humanity of a funeral and a peaceful resting place. Indeed, since 2007, there have been 30 murder cases throughout England and Wales in which no body has been recovered. In every single one of those cases, a murderer who continues to torment the families of their victims in such a cold-blooded way should under no circumstances be eligible for freedom. Jane's killer should not have the option of freedom until Jane's family are granted the dignity of a final resting place for her.

Without robust laws in place, our justice system can go horribly wrong. Take the example of the notorious Sidney Cooke, convicted child molester and serial killer. In 1989, Cooke was sentenced to 19 years for the manslaughter of 14-year-old Jason Swift, and he was guilty of the murder of seven-year-old Mark Tildesley. But in 1989, his sentence was reduced to 16 years, and he was paroled nine years later, in April 1998, having refused rehabilitation in prison and having never revealed where Mark Tildesley's body was to his bereaved parents.

Mercifully, Cooke was rearrested in 1999 and received two life sentences. Nevertheless, that demonstrates that our justice system has made terrible mistakes in the past. We must act now to stop that happening again in future. The policy of "no body, no parole" is already in force in South Australia, and it is being considered in Australia at federal level. Under the law, convicted murderers in prison are given an opportunity to co-operate with the police in exchange for more lenient sentencing or parole options. All states in Australia have considered something like this, with South Australia and Victoria taking the lead in its actual implementation.

The law will only apply to people who have the opportunity for parole anyway, so someone could not get a lesser charge for information on the whereabouts of a body if they had no chance of parole from the outset. At the same time, just describing the location of a victim's body would not guarantee a murderer early release. The Parole Board would still have the final say and could deny it if the perpetrator still posed a threat to society. As of now, Australia is the only country that has implemented something like this, even at the local level.

Along with my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North and many others, I firmly believe that the UK could lead the way and be the second country to enshrine this law. This would not only give grieving families the chance for some closure but serve as a future example to others. I hope that the Minister will today outline the

Ministry of Justice's plans to amend the law to reflect this groundbreaking and fair mechanism, to deliver justice to the families who deserve it and to the memories of so many people. Jane Harrison's family must not be let down by our justice system, and I hope that the Minister will agree that we all have a duty to preserve Jane's memory. Jane should be remembered in life, more than in death, as a loving mum, sister and daughter.

This was not an easy speech to write and this is a very difficult subject for any of us to talk about, so I would like to end with a few words from Jane's sister, Claire, who I know has fought for years for justice for her sister:

"We were so close, and we spoke every day. She was a wonderful sister, and a devoted mother. And I know that the last thing that my sister thought of the day she died was of her two boys.

This grief that we have carried for twenty-two years, it doesn't get easier—it gets harder each day. And not to have some closure, somewhere for us to gather, to lay flowers—it is absolute agony.

I want to ask the Minister, what if this was a member of your family? Can you put yourself in our shoes? Could you stand to see a man who has caused such devastation walk free?

Please help us, for the sake of our whole family, for the memory of our wonderful Jane—and for all those who have had to suffer the same agony before and since."

Please listen.

2.47 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing this important debate today. I should like to express my deepest sympathies to Jane Harrison's family. It is impossible to imagine the pain they have experienced and continue to suffer after losing Jane in such tragic circumstances. I should also like to take this opportunity to extend my deepest sympathies to Marie McCourt, who has tirelessly campaigned for a law change in memory of her daughter, Helen.

On a personal level, when considering this debate and, indeed, the private Member's Bill introduced by the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn), I recalled the sight of Winnie Johnson, the mother of Keith Bennett, who died never knowing where her son was buried. Indeed, her face etched with agony on every anniversary of the Moors murders stays with me. To lose a loved one in such circumstances is truly horrendous. The fact that Winnie was then denied the opportunity to give her son a proper burial is too awful even to comprehend, so I understand why the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden has secured this debate and why the hon. Member for St Helens North is pursuing his campaign for Helen's law.

The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden has set out the background to the case. I must stress that, as a Justice Minister, I would not normally comment on individual cases. As should be clear, this case involves a conviction for manslaughter, not murder. I do not think it would be helpful to revisit now that conviction or to discuss the difference between what amounts to the offence of murder or manslaughter. It might be helpful, however, for me to explain the different options available when sentencing for manslaughter and the different consequences of these sentences.

Murder is the only offence that carries a mandatory life sentence. In every case where someone is convicted of murder, they will receive a life sentence. Apart from

[Dr Phillip Lee]

the most serious cases, which receive a whole-life order, the court will set a tariff for the offender. That means they will serve a minimum time before they are considered for release, and will be released only when the independent Parole Board considers it safe to do so.

Manslaughter, on the other hand, has a maximum penalty of a life sentence, but that sentence is discretionary, rather than mandatory. The judge can impose a life sentence, or any other sentence short of a life sentence, having considered all the factors in each case. The length of the custodial sentence imposed must reflect the culpability of the offender. In the case of manslaughter, that can vary widely given the wide range of behaviour that the offence covers. Defendants convicted of manslaughter can, and do, receive standard determinate sentences.

In contrast to a life sentence, and since the introduction of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, prisoners serving a standard determinate sentence are automatically released at the halfway point of their sentence. The remainder of the sentence is served on licence in the community. While on licence, offenders will be subject to probation supervision and the licence will include appropriate conditions. If an offender breaches those conditions, they may be recalled to prison. I stress that offenders serving standard determinate sentences are released automatically by statute and are not considered for release at the discretion of a body such as the Parole Board. It is worth noting that an offender convicted of manslaughter who is serving a determinate sentence of whatever length will not be eligible for release earlier than the halfway point of their sentence under the home detention curfew scheme.

The judiciary are of course aware of how sentences are structured when determining the appropriate sentence in a case, and explain the effect of the sentence in open court. Therefore, any offender subject to a determinate sentence will be released at a fixed point, irrespective of whether they admit their guilt or co-operate with the authorities, and their sentence will come to an end at a fixed point. There is no discretion under the law to hold them beyond the sentence that was imposed by the court. To change that would require a significant change in the law and to sentencing generally. It also raises some practical issues that I will mention briefly.

The practical issues are similar to the issues championed by the private Member's Bill of the hon. Member for St Helens North—otherwise known as Helen's law—in response to the murder of Helen McCourt. I stress that the Government sympathise with the calls for a Helen's law. Along with the sentencing Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), I met the hon. Member for St Helens North to discuss his private Member's Bill earlier this week. I congratulate him on his approach during that meeting. I again express my respect and admiration for Marie McCourt, who has led the campaign for Helen's law. I pay tribute to her commitment to the issue and her tireless work over many years. As I said earlier, any murder is horrific and no family should have to go through such a traumatic experience with the added pain of not knowing the whereabouts of their loved one and being denied the chance to lay them to rest. For that reason, the Government welcome the discussion generated by the Unlawful Killing (Recovery of Remains) Bill.

I think the hon. Member for St Helens North would be the first to accept that his Bill does not present a legally sound solution to this difficult issue. In short, it proposes to deny release to those who refuse to disclose the whereabouts of their victims' remains. The Government recognise the honourable intentions behind this approach. There are, however, some concerns regarding how the proposed changes can be delivered—concerns regarding the legality of some of the provisions, as well as the potentially adverse effect on the families of victims if they were made aware of information disclosed by offenders. As the victims Minister, I will always represent and work hard towards delivering in the best interest of victims of crime. As such, I intend to ensure that any changes made to the current process are tailored towards delivering a just and fair outcome.

I do not want to get into any technical or legal details during this debate, but let me say that we all have to be careful not to support something that would create perverse incentives for offenders to lie about where the victim's remains are located, to try and secure release or to further torment victims' families. There is a risk that each and every time an offender claimed to remember where the victim's remains had been buried, they would have to be taken seriously, which could result in them being allowed to leave prison temporarily to help authorities search for the body. In that regard, I think, once again, about Winnie Johnson. We do not want offenders creating false stories to toy with victims' families or to create false hope. The further pain and anxiety that could be inflicted upon victims' families as a result of this is simply unthinkable.

Additionally, while the Government have been unable to examine the Bill in detail, there are several other complex practical and legal issues arising from the proposals. These could include avoiding arbitrary sentences; being clear about the level of co-operation required and whether this needs to lead to a successful outcome; and avoiding unlawful retrospective application of provisions.

I would, however, like to reassure the House that the Government are taking this issue very seriously. As already mentioned, I met the hon. Member for St Helens North earlier this week to discuss his Bill and the options going forward. The Government understand the importance of this issue and are committed to considering what more can be done.

**Conor McGinn:** I want to place on record my thanks to the Minister and the Ministry of Justice for meeting me this week and for the constructive approach they have taken. Notwithstanding what he has said, I do not believe that any of the practical difficulties is insurmountable. In terms of the impact on victims, the thing that is causing Marie McCourt and her family and Jane Harrison's family most torment and anguish is the thought that the murderer of their loved ones will be released from prison. The Minister should make no mistake about that whatever.

**Dr Lee:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and, of course, I get that.

The Government wrote to the independent Parole Board last year and asked it to review its guidance in respect of prisoners serving life sentences who do not accept full responsibility for their offence and who wilfully fail to disclose the whereabouts of their victim.

While it is not directly relevant in this case, the Parole Board is strengthening its guidance, which will be issued in the spring, clarifying the issues that may need to be considered where the offender does not disclose the whereabouts of the victim's body. While the guidance reaffirms that the Parole Board's primary focus is on the risk to the public, it makes it clear that the offender's withholding of this information may raise factors that are relevant to risk and can therefore result in the offender not being released.

I should also mention that the Parole Board continues to improve and develop the way it liaises with and involves victims in its decision making. I very much welcome its approach, which recognises how difficult it must be for victims to engage in any consideration of an offender's release.

In addition, the Government are aware of the recent developments in some other countries, and we will be examining these approaches in more detail and seeing how they work in practice. Mercifully, these cases are rare, but we will consider whether these approaches would be appropriate for our justice system in England and Wales.

With reference to the question that was raised about the family having a chance to influence the conditions

of release, it is not appropriate for me to discuss individual details of the case here. As the Department has previously said, we will be happy to meet the family to update them. I know they have been kept informed of any developments in the case by the victim liaison officer in the national probation service, on any move to open conditions and on the eligibility and conditions for any temporary release.

I would like to end by again extending my deepest sympathies to the family of Jane Harrison, and I thank the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden for drawing this issue to the attention of the House. As victims Minister, I firmly believe that victims are at the heart of our criminal justice system, and I know that this is a deeply distressing and troubling issue for victims' families.

There is, sadly, no easy solution here. I can tell the hon. lady that we will examine all the options that might provide a lawful and effective way to discourage offenders from withholding information. We all agree that we should consider any practical solution that will allow families to lay their loved ones to rest.

*Question put and agreed to.*

2.58 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Friday 3 February 2017

## TREASURY

### ECOFIN

#### **The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):**

A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) was held in Brussels on 27 January 2017. EU Finance Ministers discussed the following items:

#### *Early morning session*

Ministers were briefed on the outcomes of the 26 January meeting of the Eurogroup and the European Commission presented an update on the current economic situation.

#### *VAT: reverse charge mechanism*

The Commission gave a presentation on the proposal for a temporary derogation to apply a generalised reverse charge mechanism, which was followed by an exchange of views.

#### *Current financial service legislative proposals*

The Council presidency provided an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

#### *Presentation of the presidency work programme*

The Maltese presidency of the Council of the European Union presented its priorities for ECOFIN over the next six months.

#### *European semester 2017*

Ministers adopted Council conclusions on the annual growth survey (AGS), alert mechanism report (AMR) and approved the Council recommendations on the economic policy of the euro area.

#### *Basel Committee's post-crisis banking reform agenda*

The Commission gave Ministers an update on the progress made on the finalisation of the post-crisis reforms since the Basel meeting in November 2016, followed by an exchange of views between Ministers.

#### *High-level group on own resources*

Mario Monti, Chair of the high-level group on own resources, presented the group's final report, which was followed by an exchange of views between Ministers.

#### *EIB Economic Resilience Initiative*

Werner Hoyer, president of the European Investment Bank, outlined the state of play of the Economic Resilience Initiative and provided preliminary evidence of its initial implementation and the ongoing fundraising process for the grant component of the initiative.

[HCWS457]

## DEFENCE

### NATO-led Kosovo Force

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mike Penning):** A new order has been made under section 56(1B) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to enable reservists to be called into permanent service in support of the United Kingdom's contribution to the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR).

The communiqué issued at the Warsaw summit in July 2016 makes it clear that the future operational posture, capability and disposition of KFOR will be conditions based and not calendar driven. Stability and

security in Kosovo help to enhance the security of the United Kingdom. Intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities are important contributors to KFOR's situation awareness and its ability to engage with local and international institutions, and of Commander KFOR's ability to assess future posture. The UK has agreed to generate Human Terrain Reconnaissance forces to enhance the situational awareness of Commander KFOR to execute his mandate in Kosovo. This capability will operate in parallel with and within the ISR Battalion headquarters to provide command and control for UK forces.

Some of the specialist skills needed to meet this requirement are held within the Army Reserve. UK forces will deploy for a period of 12 months, consisting of two rotations of six months each. It is planned for the first unit to deploy in late March 2017. The number of reservists anticipated to deploy as specialists or in support of regular units is estimated at up to 22 per deployment.

The order took effect from the beginning of 23 January 2017 and shall cease to have effect at the end of 22 January 2018.

[HCWS456]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Environment Council

#### **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):**

I attended the EU Environment Council in Brussels on 19 December along with the Minister for Climate Change and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd).

I wish to update the House on the matters discussed. *EU Emissions Trading System (ETS)—progress report.*

The Council undertook a full roundtable debate on the EU emissions trading system, on the basis of the presidency's progress report. Ministers set out respective policy positions, and called for agreement at the next Environment Council in February. The presidency regretted that it had not been able to achieve a general approach, but felt that progress had been made on a range of technical issues. It identified the main issues to be resolved as rules for supporting sectors at risk of "carbon leakage" (where production relocates outside of the EU as a result of carbon costs); tackling the over-supply of emission allowances to provide a more meaningful carbon price signal; and management of the funds which support decarbonisation of the EU's industrial and energy sectors. The Commission drew attention to the recent ENVI Committee vote in the European Parliament, setting out that this showed compromise was possible on ETS, and called on the Council to match the European Parliament's timetable in order to allow trilogues to start in March. It highlighted the importance of reaching agreement on the EU ETS directive in order to demonstrate progress in implementing the Paris agreement and in providing business and investor certainty.

The UK thanked the outgoing presidency for its hard work and called on the Council to maintain ambition and pace under the Maltese presidency, with a view to finding consensus. The UK's main priorities were addressing the surplus of allowances and strengthening the carbon price signal via an amendment to the market stability reserve; targeting carbon leakage protection to those genuinely at risk; ensuring that the modernisation fund

was based on clear, collaborative governance; avoiding the infringement of member states' fiscal sovereignty through provisions to allow member states to provide compensation for the indirect costs of EU ETS; and alleviating as much administrative burden as possible without undermining environmental integrity.

*AOB—Effort Share Regulation and Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation.*

The presidency gave an update on the state of play of these live legislative negotiations following publication of the Commission proposals in July 2016.

*AOB—Communication on Clean Energy for All Europeans.*

The Commission outlined the objectives and content of its recently published “clean energy package” and communication on clean energy for all Europeans.

*AOB—Report on recent international meetings: UNFCCC Marrakesh, 7-18 November (COP22).*

The presidency outlined the progress made at UNFCCC COP22 in Marrakesh in November. The Commission underscored its commitment to making progress on the 2030 climate and energy framework.

*The protection of human health and the environment through sound management of chemicals—Council conclusions.*

The presidency underlined the importance of the Council adopting conclusions given the ongoing work in this area including at international level. All who spoke endorsed the conclusions but stressed points of importance, including the ongoing regulatory fitness check (REFIT) of REACH, the commitments made under the 7th environmental action plan, the links to the circular economy package, the need to address endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) and more consumer information.

The UK stressed the need to ensure chemical policy continued to be based on a better regulation and a risk-based approach.

On this basis the presidency concluded the conclusions were adopted as drafted.

*AOB—REFIT fitness check of habitats and birds directives.*

The Commission informed delegations of its findings, presented in the recent staff working document on the nature directives, which noted that the directives were fit for purpose. The Commission noted that the EU should focus on smarter implementation. The UK welcomed the conclusions of the Commission's fitness check (to improve implementation of the directives and not to reopen them) and called for more effective implementation together with the sharing of experiences on how to do this between member states. Many other member states made similar points and asked the Commission to actively focus on better tools and resources in order to achieve better implementation.

*AOB—Outcome of International Meetings: Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), 66th Meeting of International Whaling Commission and COP9 UNECE Convention on Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents.*

The presidency and the Commission informed Council on the outcomes of these recent international meetings.

*AOB—State of play of the Waste Package.*

The Council took note of information from the presidency and the progress it had made on negotiations of the waste package. The Commission agreed there was good progress and expressed hope a deal could be reached with the European Parliament during the Maltese presidency. On the substance, the Commission supported a common methodology for calculating recycling targets, separate collection, the use of economic instruments and ambitious recycling targets. Other member states intervened on topics of interest, including conflicting views on the levels of targets and reuse within the package, the phase-out of landfill and the proposed calculation methodology.

The UK welcomed the progress made under the Slovak presidency and emphasised the need to agree definitions and calculation methodology before setting targets. The UK also called for greater flexibility in the application of provisions on the circular economy and, while being supportive of the principle of reuse, highlighted the bureaucratic hurdles its inclusion in reporting could entail.

*AOB—Maltese Incoming Work Programme.*

The presidency gave a short summary of its achievements over the last six months. Malta, as incoming presidency, then explained its priorities, including a desire to build on the Marrakech COP22, advance both ETS and non-ETS negotiations and continue work to amend the waste directives. Priorities also included a focus on marine issues, including a development of a plastic strategy in the context of the circular economy, work on the nature directives, amending the restriction of hazardous substances (ROHS) directive and preparations for conferences of the parties on the Stockholm convention on persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and the Rotterdam convention on the prior informed consent procedure for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade.

*Further Environment AOBs.*

Council took note of an AOB from Austrian, French, Finnish and German delegations, supported by Czech Republic and Italy, which encouraged member states participation in next year's European sustainable development week. Council also took note of an AOB from Hungary on the outcome of the Budapest water summit and an AOB information from the Commission on the communication on next steps for a sustainable European future. Poland presented an AOB on odour nuisance. The Czech Republic presented its AOB on the REFIT evaluation of the EU ecolabel.

On 23 June, the EU referendum took place and the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Until exit negotiations are concluded, the UK remains a full member of the European Union and all the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force. During this period the Government will continue to negotiate, implement and apply EU legislation. The outcome of these negotiations will determine what arrangements apply in relation to EU legislation in future once the UK has left the EU.

[HCWS455]

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

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Environment Council.....	34WS		

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**not later than  
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*Not amended, considered; read the Third time and passed*

**Broadcasting (Radio Multiplex Services) Bill [Col. 1346]**

*Not amended, considered; read the Third time and passed*

**Child Poverty in the UK (Target for Reduction) Bill [Col. 1363]**

*Motion for Second Reading—(Dan Jarvis)*

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**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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