

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY BUILDINGS (RESTORATION AND RENEWAL) BILL

Second Sitting

Tuesday 4 June 2019

(Evening)

CONTENTS

SCHEDULE 1 agreed to.
CLAUSE 3 agreed to.
SCHEDULE 2 agreed to.
CLAUSES 4 TO 8 agreed to.
SCHEDULE 3 agreed to.
CLAUSE 9 agreed to.
SCHEDULE 4 agreed to.
CLAUSES 10 TO 15 agreed to.
New clauses considered.
Bill to be reported, without amendment.
Written evidence reported to the House.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Saturday 8 June 2019

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2019

This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright/.

The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* † DAVID HANSON, SIR GARY STREETER

Afolami, Bim (*Hitchin and Harpenden*) (Con)
 † Brake, Tom (*Carshalton and Wallington*) (LD)
 † Bryant, Chris (*Rhondda*) (Lab)
 † Churchill, Jo (*Bury St Edmunds*) (Con)
 † Elmore, Chris (*Ogmore*) (Lab)
 † Foster, Kevin (*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales*)
 † Graham, Luke (*Ochil and South Perthshire*) (Con)
 † Gray, Neil (*Airdrie and Shotts*) (SNP)
 † Hair, Kirstene (*Angus*) (Con)
 † Hillier, Meg (*Hackney South and Shoreditch*) (Lab/Co-op)

† Jones, Mr David (*Clwyd West*) (Con)
 † McLoughlin, Sir Patrick (*Derbyshire Dales*) (Con)
 † Matheson, Christian (*City of Chester*) (Lab)
 † Prisk, Mr Mark (*Hertford and Stortford*) (Con)
 † Robinson, Mary (*Cheadle*) (Con)
 † Snell, Gareth (*Stoke-on-Trent Central*) (Lab/Co-op)
 † Tami, Mark (*Alyn and Deeside*) (Lab)

Joanna Dodd, Mike Everett, *Committee Clerks*

† **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Tuesday 4 June 2019

(Evening)

[DAVID HANSON *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill

7.30 pm

Schedule 1

THE PARLIAMENTARY WORKS SPONSOR BODY

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move amendment 8, in schedule 1, page 10, line 11, leave out “appointed from amongst both” and insert “elected from”.

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

Amendment 9, in schedule 1, page 10, line 12, after “and” insert “appointed from”.

Amendment 4, in schedule 1, page 10, line 20, at end insert—

“(4) The number of members of the House Commons and the members of the House of Lords must be equal.

(5) At least one member referred to in sub-paragraph 1(c) must be a HM Treasury Minister.”

Amendment 10, in schedule 1, page 11, line 19, after “appointment” insert “or election”.

Amendment 11, in schedule 1, page 11, line 20, after “appointed” add “or elected”.

Amendment 7, in schedule 1, page 11, line 23, after “Minister of the Crown” insert “other than a HM Treasury Minister”.

Amendment 12, in schedule 1, page 11, line 27, after “appointment” insert “or election”.

Amendment 13, in schedule 1, page 11, line 29, at end insert—

“4A (1) The Parliamentary members from the House of Commons must be drawn from a range of parties in the House of Commons and must include a representative from a party that is not one of the three largest parties in the House of Commons.

(2) The Parliamentary members from the House of Commons are to be elected by Members of Parliament from their own party, or, in the case of the Parliamentary member who is not from one of the three largest parties, by Members of Parliament who are not from one of the three largest parties.”

Meg Hillier: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson.

I tabled amendments 8 to 13 partly to explore how we could make sure that the membership of the Sponsor Body would reflect the make-up of the House, to note the importance of having elections, and for consequential purposes. We now have elections for Select Committee

Chairs, and for Select Committee Back Benchers. That reform has swept through the House, but it was not proposed for the Sponsor Body. The main point is to enshrine balance and the principle of election in the Bill.

I recognise that if there were an election it would be a challenge for smaller parties to get representation. That would be one of the benefits of going through the usual channels. However, there is of course a benefit in elections, because people are held directly accountable by the electorate, whether it is their party group or a wider electorate. I did not have the opportunity to discuss the matter with the usual channels, who, I am sure, have views, and I should be happy to hear the Minister’s views. However, an important principle is involved, about election and being held accountable, and that is the reason for my proposal. The other point is the involvement of a smaller party, and the mechanism for that.

The amendments may not be the perfect solution, but they enable the Committee at least to probe the idea of an election from among the smaller parties for their representative on the Sponsor Body. The reality is that in the time available I did not have the opportunity to gauge wider opinion and it may be that some Members in small parties would not want to devote a lot of time to the Sponsor Body. I recognise that the amendment is exploratory but I would be interested to hear the Minister’s views on the general principle of elections and balance.

We had an interesting discussion in the previous sitting, and there was a lot of talk about UK-wide representation, and getting that reflected in the works. There is a benefit to party-wide representation as the project goes forward, partly to tie in knowledge about what is going on, in each party grouping, so that people are aware. It will give a clear view that this is a cross-party parliamentary matter.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): It is a great delight to see you in the Chair, Mr Hanson.

I, too, support the idea of elections to the Sponsor Body. One of the most positive things that has happened since I became an MP in 2001 is the election of Select Committee Chairs. That means that Members from different political parties have to reach out across the whole House, and I think that that would be a positive measure in the present case.

I understand that there is some anxiety about how we would end up with the precise numbers from the different political parties. The fact that the Liberal Democrats have appointed from the Lords adds a further problem, but I still think that that should not detain us too long. It should be perfectly possible to have an election.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Hanson. I shall keep my remarks fairly brief.

I agree with the hon. Member for Rhondda that the election of Select Committee Chairmen has made a difference. The slight difference in the case of the Sponsor Body is that there will be members from both Houses. Elections to appointments do not take place in the other place, so under the amendments House of Commons

members would be elected, or a procedure would be introduced into the other place that it did not have before.

I recognise the need for members from across the United Kingdom, and representing the parties, on the future Sponsor Body. With appointments made so far to the shadow board through the usual channels, it has of course been for each political party to decide how to come to a nomination. Some parties, including mine, use the votes of Back Benchers to decide how to fill vacant slots on Select Committees, but those are submitted to the House for approval, as of course appointments to the Sponsor Body will be.

I would not support the amendments at this stage, given the fact that they could create a difference between how Lords and Commons members were appointed. They would give the impression of the body being more like a joint Select Committee when it is not; it is a legal body constituted in its own right. It is ultimately up to Parliament to decide how it establishes and appoints to this organisation, which should essentially be about making sure that Members who offer the most to the Committee are appointed, rather than those who might be the most popular among Members.

On party allocations, I recognise what has been put in the amendment around making sure that smaller parties are represented. Of course, if these positions were elected across the whole House, the larger parties would clearly benefit, given their weight of numbers.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I point out to the Minister that a larger party today may be a smaller party tomorrow.

Kevin Foster: I take the view that, whatever the political situation, the constitution should be able to cope with it, respond and adapt.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): He should know!

Kevin Foster: Indeed. That is very unkind from the right hon. Gentleman, to be fair. I did not necessarily wish to point out that the party that for many years was the first party here no longer holds that position due to significant seat losses in the 2015 general election. However, we think there is a lot to be said for appointing the right people, rather than electing the most popular. I will give way to someone who has many years of experience.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. Before he takes any lectures from Liberal Democrat Members about how this system works, it is worth reminding them that on no occasion have any of their Select Committee Chairmen, so far as I can remember, been elected by the whole House. They do deals within their party to only put one candidate forward on the Committees where they have the chairmanship, so the House has therefore not had the opportunity, for those particular Committees, to have the vote that the hon. Member for Rhondda talked about. That is a bit of failure in their system.

Kevin Foster: I thank my right hon. Friend for sharing his encyclopaedic knowledge of how this place works. Although I understand the thrust of the amendments,

they would create the unusual position of electing Members in one House and appointing them in another. On ensuring party balance, as I say, the Liberal Democrats have chosen to appoint a peer, rather than a Member of the House of Commons. It is for them to choose the person they feel most appropriate to represent their party; it is not necessarily for the Government or for other Members to do that.

This is not about electing people to a post where they would necessarily function for the whole House. For example, the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch acts for the whole House as the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee—she is very distinguished in that role—and, as the only one, she therefore has to work for all Members. I agree that that has been a worthwhile and useful innovation in our constitution. It has helped to solidify the independence of Select Committee Chairs and has probably led to people being elected who would not necessarily have got through the usual channels under the old system.

However, I think it is appropriate that we reflect in the House on the fact that such elections would be an innovation and would set a precedent for the House of Lords; they have not had them for these positions before. I suggest that to introduce the amendments would not necessarily be helpful to the spirit of how the Bill has moved forward. I point to the three Members in the room who have been strong members of the shadow Sponsor Body, which shows that we can appoint the right people to this group once it is founded in law.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair tonight, Mr Hanson. I apologise for not seeking with sufficient vigour to catch your eye earlier and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak now.

I will first speak briefly to the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch, which would bring elections in for the House of Lords. To challenge one aspect of the Minister's statement—that that is something the Lords is not used to—their lordships are used to the bizarre elections of hereditary peers. I am afraid that, when they happen, they are often a source of bemusement when we see three candidates competing for one post, all from a hereditary position.

With your permission, Mr Hanson, I shall speak briefly to the two amendments in my name. Amendment 4 is about achieving an equal number of representatives from each House, and amendment 7 is about a Treasury Minister playing a role on the Sponsor Body. As the Opposition have said, we fully support the creation of the Sponsor Body. A programme of such immense size and complexity requires clear governance and an effective system of administration. The Sponsor Body must be accountable and representative, including representatives from both Houses, Government and, potentially, experts with a heritage or construction background.

Under the current plans, there is an extra peer on the Sponsor Body, leaving unequal numbers of peers and MPs. We would like to see that rectified. I fully respect the right of the Liberal Democrats to choose who they think is fit, although I have to say that the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington answers with aplomb on behalf of the House of Commons Commission.

[*Christian Matheson*]

He has demonstrated his ability to serve on committees such as this, and whoever is chosen, they will have a high bar to hit in order to match his contributions.

To rectify the imbalance—we want equal membership from both sides—we support the Joint Committee’s recommendation that a Treasury Minister sit as an ad hoc member of the Sponsor Body, attending when necessary. That brings me to amendment 7. That Committee stated that

“a Treasury Minister should be an additional member of the Sponsor Body.”

It said that that would

“underpin the hierarchy of decision making and...provide clarity to those delivering the project”.

The Government rejected that recommendation, instead insisting that the Estimates Commission consult Her Majesty’s Treasury on the annual estimates for the funding of the R and R programme. The Estimates Commission is instructed to “have regard” to any subsequent advice given by the Treasury.

In my view, a Treasury Minister should be tied in throughout the process by membership of the Sponsor Body. Although we agree that the Treasury should be subordinate to Parliament in shaping restoration and renewal, we believe that the presence of a Treasury Minister within the Sponsor Body would allow for sufficient buy-in by the Government throughout this lengthy process. It would also provide someone from the Government side to drive forward the process. Hon. Members have referred to the role that Tessa Jowell played as a Minister during the London Olympics project. She, too, performed her role with excellence.

The Government would be directly consulted and responsible at every step of the project. That would allow for ongoing and tough scrutiny of the costs of this huge project. Accountability and transparency can only be improved through the inclusion of a member of the Government. Given the magnitude of restoration and renewal, a Treasury member could be instrumental in responding to financial queries about the project and speaking on behalf of the Sponsor Body in Parliament. A culture of transparency and open communication will be critical to the success of the project.

Kevin Foster: I am grateful for the chance to respond to these two amendments. The first deals with the balance between the two Houses. It could be possible to have an additional member, if Parliament wished to do that, and they could be from the House of Commons, if it wished the usual channels to appoint them, but again, this comes down to the point that we have given an opportunity for a party to choose who it believes is the best person from its parliamentary members; we are clear that it could not be an individual who is not a Member of either the House of Commons or the House of Lords. And the party in question has opted to pick someone from the House of Lords, which gives a balance of four to three. I do not think that that is necessarily a negative, given that that party clearly has representation in the House of Commons. We have seen one of its very able Members making a number of very useful and constructive contributions here. I do not think that the point should necessarily be specified in statute, given

that parliamentary members have to be approved by a resolution of both Houses. If Members of the House of Commons were concerned—for the sake of argument—that a party had decided to appoint more members from the House of Lords, it would be open to Members of the House of Commons to block that, and similarly, if there were an attempt to remove membership from the House of Lords, it could move to ensure that a fair balance was maintained.

That is why I suggest that the amendment would not be appropriate. This is about allowing the body to have the parliamentary members who can contribute the most but who are answerable to Parliament and have to be appointed by Parliament as well. Democratic oversight ultimately is there in the fact that we, as the House of Commons, could decline appointments if we felt that they were not appropriate or the balance was being got wrong.

7.45 pm

To move on to the amendment relating to a Treasury Minister, there will clearly need to be close engagement between the Sponsor Body and the Treasury, as there will between the Sponsor Body and the Comptroller and Auditor General on audit function. The Government do not support the idea of a Treasury Minister being part of the Sponsor Body. We believe that would blur the lines of accountability and create wider issues more generally.

We are clear that the role of the Treasury in this project is as an external party looking inwards, defending taxpayers’ interests and engaging with thoughts and advice to Parliament and the House of Commons as it decides on the estimates process. I am certain we will also receive valuable contributions from the Public Accounts Committee, driven by the work of the National Audit Office and its reports, as we saw last year when the motion passed by the House reflected recommendations from the Public Accounts Committee, which had been put forward in an amendment.

Having a Treasury Minister as a member of the Sponsor Body could compromise that position, because the Treasury is supposed to comment on the estimates put forward by the Sponsor Body. The Treasury Minister presenting those thoughts in the Chamber would have to take off a hat as a member of the Sponsor Body and put on a hat as a Treasury Minister to comment on behalf of the Treasury.

It is right that there will have to be some engagement. Given the scale and the political importance of this project, it is almost certain that there will be a Minister identified in the Treasury who will be responsible for liaising with the Sponsor Body. Those arrangements will come when we get more into the detail once the body is established and starting to deliver its programme.

With regard to accountability, it is worth saying again that there will need to be discussion through the usual channels and in the House to decide exactly how it wishes to hold to account members of the Sponsor Body. It has been alluded to that members of the House of Commons Commission do on occasion answer oral questions in the Chamber, although we do not yet know how that process will work in detail. That is not something that we want in primary legislation or a schedule, given that, as the project progresses, we may vary the level of

scrutiny. It could be very intense as we approach 2021 when satisfying ourselves on the estimates and what is going forward. I suspect it will continue to be quite intense through the main body of works, but nearing the end of the project there will be a debate about how much engagement there should be as we approach the conclusion of the project.

That is why the Government are not keen to have a Treasury Minister as a member of the Sponsor Body. It would blur accountability and that Minister's role in the project in both commenting on and being a member of the Sponsor Body.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I thank the Minister for giving way. I remember that, when we published the Joint Committee report, there was some concern about the ambiguity of the Government's position regarding restoration and renewal. It seems now that, with the former Leader of the House driving the project forward, the Government's position has been more supportive. However, can the Minister understand the criticism being levelled at the Government? Not accepting a Treasury Minister on the Sponsor Body might well be seen as the Government once again trying to distance themselves and not being foursquare in support of the project?

Kevin Foster: It is safe to say that the Government fully support the project and will facilitate the will of the House to take it forward, hence the introduction of the Bill and the role played by the Leader of the House.

If we look at the structure of the Public Accounts Committee, technically a Treasury Minister is a member and gives a speech once a year which is a 10-minute statement of support for the audit process. If that Minister took part in the actual inquiries and the debates of the Public Accounts Committee, I do not think that would enhance its work, and I speak as a former member of that Committee. It could inevitably inject a party political element to its work. The Public Accounts Committee is very strong because it is seen as a resolutely cross-party body.

I do not think the Government's position shows a lack of commitment. It shows our desire to have the Sponsor Body, the client, working towards instructions Parliament has given it. The Treasury will play a role in engaging, defending the taxpayers' interests and providing comments, so that it can give a view when the House decides on the estimates process. It would be rather strange to say that Members would think it better for a Treasury Minister to be part of the body that they were commenting on, rather than being enabled on behalf of the Treasury to comment on the Sponsor Body's work. Again, Members from the governing party will be on the body, and we can see the commitments we have made. The Government see clearly that there is a need to take forward restoration and renewal, and I think that Opposition Front Benchers take exactly the same view. Carrying on patching this place up is not an alternative, because each year the bills are getting bigger and bigger and the taxpayer is having to pay more and more to achieve a worse outcome. No Government would wish to endorse or support that.

I understand the reason for amendment 4, but the Government feel that it would be better were the Treasury to engage with the Sponsor Body through the clear

relationship and link set out in the Bill. Treasury Ministers will be open to questions in the House about the Government's work and commitment throughout the life of the project, rather than having to give a caveat, along the lines of, "Today I am answering as an HM Treasury Minister, but tomorrow I will be answering as a Sponsor Body member." That would not sound or look right to me; it would create a conflicted role, or a position in which the Treasury Minister was almost an honorary member of the Sponsor Body, rather than taking part in its work in detail.

The Government's strong preference is for the amendment not to be made. That does not in any way diminish the commitment and the strong links that the Treasury and Parliament will need to have with the Sponsor Body as it takes the project forward.

Meg Hillier: I will not press my amendment to a vote on this occasion. I hear what the Minister says; the Sponsor Body is an unusual body. In the time that I have had available, we have not yet settled how we will deal with election, but I think I have laid a marker. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda says, we believe in elections; I get the impression that Conservative Members do, too. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I beg to move amendment 5, in schedule 1, page 10, line 25, at end insert—

"(2A) A person who has already gone through a fair and open competition to be appointed chair of the shadow Sponsor Body will be deemed already to have met the requirement in paragraph 2(2) above."

This amendment would allow the chair of the shadow Sponsor Body to be appointed chair of the Sponsor Body without the need for a new recruitment exercise.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment 6, in schedule 1, page 11, line 5, at end insert—

"(3A) A person who has already gone through a fair and open competition to be appointed as an external member of the shadow Sponsor Body will be deemed already to have met the requirement in paragraph 3(2) above."

This amendment would allow the external members of the shadow Sponsor Body to be appointed external members of the Sponsor Body without the need for a new recruitment exercise.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I do not want to take long over this; I very much welcome the Bill making faster progress than I thought it might while discussions were taking place. It has moved up the Government's agenda as other things have been taken away, but we do not need to discuss that further.

A glaring omission in the Bill concerns recreating the Sponsor Body. I declare an interest, in that I am a member of the shadow Sponsor Body, but I would not be covered by my amendments, which are aimed at those members who only last year went through a full and open process and were selected to do their jobs. At a stage when the shadow Sponsor Body has only just started carrying out its tasks, I think it would be wrong to put a question mark over those members.

[Sir Patrick McLoughlin]

Amendments 5 and 6 simply reflect the fact that last year the chairman and the other members went through a full and open process, and I would like them to be incorporated into the new Sponsor Body for some time. I accept that terms will end naturally and I am aware that there will need to be discussions about how their replacements should be appointed—I fully support that, but it would be wrong for the Bill to put a question mark over those members so quickly.

Mark Tami: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that although it has taken time, those people have built up a lot of experience and knowledge? If we have a cliff edge where we could lose a lot of people, that would be very damaging for the whole project.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for co-sponsoring the amendment and showing the cross-party feeling, and some people have already sat on the shadow sponsor body as a result of the House's decisions. I think I am suggesting a reasonable way forward, but the Minister may have other ideas, which I am happy to consider.

It is right that we make progress and that we do so in an orderly way. Any appointments must be made in a proper, fair, robust and orderly manner. Things that are happening at the moment with the Bill, which I welcome, mean that we are perhaps progressing at a faster rate than originally imagined.

Christian Matheson: Briefly, I welcome the remarks of the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales in support of his amendment, and I note that my right hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside also put his name to it. It is a common-sense amendment that Labour fully supports, and we hope that the Minister will consider it fairly.

Neil Gray: For completeness, all three members of the current shadow sponsor body support the amendment, as do I.

Christian Matheson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales on finding such consensus. I hope the Minister will add to it.

Kevin Foster: When the Bill was drafted, automatic transfer was considered, but there were concerns about whether it could be implemented in practice. There were also thoughts about the possibility of permanent appointments and the clear need to have a performance review in other areas. Having listened to the representations and comments made, I suggest that, rather than accept the amendment today, we should work on an acceptable form of wording for a motion that we will be happy to support on Report. We take on board the principle, but we must ensure that we do not set up a system in which the appointments of all the external members come up for renewal on one day. We must ensure an appropriate transfer.

We have listened to the representations from my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales, the right hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside, and the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts who are on the current

shadow board. Having had a recruitment process last year, it would be strange to look for reappointments this year, especially because of the potential impact on continuity. As I have said, the House will take significant decisions, potentially in 2021, about moving the project forward. We must consider whether it would be sensible to do that with a clean slate of external members, or to put people through a reapplication process when they are just bedding in and starting to get into the complex detail of the role. I hope it will be acceptable to the Committee if we take away the principle behind the amendment, which I am happy to support, and work it into a motion that we can support on Report.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I am prepared to accept the Minister's assurances, and will not seek to push the amendment to a vote. There is a practical way forward, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's suggestions for the parliamentary draftsmen. As someone who has sat in his seat on other occasions knowing that the drafting is inappropriate, I now look forward to receiving the new drafting and getting an amendment ready for Report. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 2

THE DELIVERY AUTHORITY

8 pm

Meg Hillier: I beg to move amendment 15, in schedule 2, page 22, line 6, at end insert—

“(10) The Comptroller and Auditor General must have access rights to allow him to examine the preparedness of the Sponsor Body and the Delivery Authority to undertake the Parliamentary building works.

(11) In exercising the power in sub-paragraph (10), the Comptroller and Auditor General must have particular regard to procurement practices and the need to ensure that small businesses have sufficient opportunity to participate in the Parliamentary building works.”

One might expect that I would want to see good auditing of this project, not only because I chair the Public Accounts Committee but because, like all of us, I represent taxpayers, and it will be taxpayers who ultimately fund it. It is also important that the proper audit arrangements are in place to make sure that everybody working on the project is aware that the eyes of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the National Audit Office are on them—that is what I am proposing as the best approach to audit. That approach also brings in parliamentary scrutiny, because under the arrangements of Parliament, the National Audit Office's reports can automatically be taken up by the Public Accounts Committee. Of course, other Committees can look at the project too, but it means that we would have numbers.

For those who have not been on the Public Accounts Committee, I will set out the process. When the National Audit Office produces a report, the figures are agreed with the audited body. That enables the members of the Committee to focus on the detail rather than arguing about the numbers. The report is an accurate record of

what the costs are, but the National Audit Office also looks more widely at the efficiency and effectiveness of programmes, including how business cases are set up and so on. It is really important that we build that in from the outset. A new Comptroller and Auditor General took office on Saturday 1 June; I have not had a chance to discuss this with him in detail, but I have been in touch with the National Audit Office.

In some respects it is possible to do this without an amendment to the Bill, but it is still discretionary. Until this Bill is passed, under section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983, the CAG may be appointed an auditor of a body to which he has not been appointed by statute

“by virtue of any agreement made, whether before or after the passing of this Act, between that authority or body and a Minister of the Crown.”

An appropriately worded agreement would trigger the CAG’s economy, efficiency and effectiveness powers, but of course, we do not know if we can get that. While I would hope the Sponsor Body would embrace that, it would be helpful and not detrimental in any respect to have it in the Bill, so that it is very clear. Of course, in so far as is possible before the Act is passed, the CAG can enter into an agreement that would hopefully mirror his statutory rights.

I am very concerned, though, that we have this in statute—in the law—to embed the National Audit Office’s embrace of this role at an early stage. My amendment proposes that that happens with both the Sponsor Body and the Delivery Authority, and that it starts now, so that the National Audit Office is not looking at this project in 15 years’ time, perhaps when something has gone wrong; we build it in from day one. It would ultimately be for the Comptroller and Auditor General to decide how often he looks at this, but I would suggest an annual approach. Obviously, the National Audit Office would annually look at the accounts, if that were agreed, and would have the ability to produce individual reports on aspects of the project. That would be within the properly independent powers of the Comptroller and Auditor General. My amendment does not directly prescribe what the CAG does, because that would be wrong: he is an independent person, representative of this House and of the tax-paying public. However, it is important to set this out in statute.

There is another element that we may want to consider, and I would be interested to hear the Minister’s views on it. Currently, it is not easy for the Comptroller and Auditor General and the National Audit Office to access a company’s records. They can look at a contract between Government and another body in the private sector or wherever, and will then be able to see certain elements of what is going on with that private company, but the NAO does not have access rights to those companies’ accounts. For the purpose of value-for-money examinations, it might be helpful for the CAG to have unequivocal access to relevant information that contractors, subcontractors and grant recipients of the Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority have. I have not put that in the amendment, because I received late advice on how we might approach it, but I would be interested in the Minister’s views.

If we are really serious about ensuring that we are watching taxpayers’ money and that this does not spiral out of control, that level of audit would really hold the feet of the companies working on this project to the fire.

They would know that everything they did would be available. I should be clear that under audit rules, that would not necessarily be public information; the National Audit Office would have access, but there would still be considerations about whether it was published. It would not be an open and published document, but the National Audit Office would have access rights, as it has with the BBC and the Bank of England, two recent additional audits that it has done.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): I understand the point about the Comptroller and Auditor General. As I understand it, he reports to my hon. Friend’s Committee, the Public Accounts Committee. I just want to be clear in my own mind about the relationship between the PAC and the Sponsor Body, and whether there is a risk that two horses might be running at one time, particularly in the scrutiny process.

Meg Hillier: I am very happy to explain. The Comptroller and Auditor General is an officer of the House and accountable to Parliament. His role—it is currently a he—is to make independent decisions about value for money. He also undertakes, as he is doing right now, audits of over 700 public bodies that fall within the purview of the National Audit Office.

In constitutional terms, the Public Accounts Committee has been in existence for more than 150 years and has the first right of refusal if the Comptroller and Auditor General produces a value-for-money audit report or carries out an investigation. Other Members and other Committees of this House can ask the National Audit Office and the Comptroller and Auditor General to do some work on an issue, and it is entirely a matter for his discretion whether he chooses to do so, whether the request is from the Public Accounts Committee or from any other Committee or individual Member of this House. There have been occasions when individual Members of the House have asked the National Audit Office to look at something and it has done work that has led to some interesting outcomes. The Comptroller and Auditor General is very much a servant of the House.

The Public Accounts Committee, as the Minister highlighted, is a cross-party Committee, reflecting the balance of Parliament at the time and always chaired by a Member of the Opposition. Our job is to examine, through the audit process, what has happened. It is not to direct policy; we strictly do not discuss or make a judgment on whether a Government policy is the right thing. We are looking at the execution, efficiency, effectiveness and economy of that policy.

It could be that there is a policy that I, as an Opposition Member, vehemently oppose, but as Chair of the PAC I am looking not at the policy, but at the effectiveness of it. It has been the case for more than 150 years that members of the Committee take a clear and balanced view based on the facts presented by the National Audit Office. One of the benefits of having the National Audit Office involved is that the figures it produces in a report must be agreed with the body on which they have done a value-for-money study, so once that report is taken by the Committee, the Committee is sure that the numbers are correct and accurate and there is no argument about the figures. Those figures then become a matter of record for the House.

[Meg Hillier]

Of course, that does not preclude any other Select Committee investigating; we could, for example, have the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee looking at some of the craft skills, or the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee looking at some of the industrial impacts of the work. Constitutionally, any Committee is free to do its own work, but that is how things stand for the Public Accounts Committee. There is absolutely no conflict there.

It is important—I hope the Minister agrees—that even if this is not perfect yet, we seek advice from the National Audit Office and others about how we can ensure we get the most effective scrutiny of this multibillion-pound taxpayer-funded project, so that after the Committee stage and once the Bill is passed, we can reassure our constituents that we have written into the Bill the strongest possible audit of the value for money of this project.

Kevin Foster: I welcome the spirit of the speech and the hon. Lady's approach. From my perspective, we believe the Comptroller and Auditor General has a range of powers over this, and it is worth noting that the role he would play is specifically referred to in schedule 2 at the bottom of page 21, where, again, it says that the Comptroller and Auditor General “must” send a copy of the statement of accounts—it does not say “may”.

At this stage, including the amendment is not necessarily the approach I would suggest we adopt in this Committee, but certainly, once the Sponsor Body is up and running and has agreed on engagement with Parliament, it is almost unimaginable that, as a project having a large amount of public funds spent on it, it would not look for strong engagement from the Comptroller and Auditor General, and look, bluntly, to how its own existence came about. A strong Public Accounts Committee report was exactly what persuaded the House to support the decant option, against the arguments of several hon. Members who were not too fond of that option, but who understood the logic. Certainly what persuaded me to vote in a free vote for the full decant option was reading the Public Accounts Committee's conclusions, which were based on the NAO's work on which option would represent the best value for money. Making the amendment to the schedule at this stage might not be the most appropriate thing, but I am more than happy for us to take it away and reflect on the structure.

When it comes to agreeing the relationship between the Sponsor Body and Parliament, it is almost inevitable that we will need to consider closely the relationship with the Comptroller and Auditor General, especially in terms of when the estimates come forward. It would be hard to imagine that many Members of the House would not look to the quality of the assessment done by the Comptroller and Auditor General and then the conclusions the Public Accounts Committee has drawn in relation to his or her work.

Neil Gray: I note that the Minister referred earlier to a slightly different area, which was how the project could be beneficial across the United Kingdom. Perhaps this would be an opportunity for the Minister to reflect briefly on amendment 1.

Kevin Foster: Certainly. I will briefly finish referring to the issues around the Comptroller and Auditor General, and then, with the Chair's permission, I will perhaps make some brief references to amendment 1 in the context of procurement practices and spreading things out.

The Chair: I should tell the Minister that amendment 1 was not selected. If he wishes to comment, he may want to reflect on the issue without mentioning the words “amendment 1”.

Kevin Foster: As always, I will be guided by the sage advice on procedure that you provide, Mr Hanson.

There is a view that making an amendment that gives additional powers and functions to the Comptroller and Auditor General would be unusual. It would not normally be considered an appropriate change, but I hope the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch will take from my comments the value that is definitely placed on the role of the Comptroller and Auditor General, the NAO and the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr Prisk: To be clear, from what I have heard from the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch who chairs the Public Accounts Committee, there is the option, where the Sponsor Body has concerns about a particular aspect, for it to approach the Comptroller and Auditor General and commission certain works—whether he takes them on or not—and the Comptroller and Auditor General would then report directly to the Sponsor Body or through the PAC to the Sponsor Body. We need to be clear about who is talking to whom and who is commissioning what from whom.

Kevin Foster: To be clear, at the bottom of page 21, at line 40, the measure states:

“The Comptroller and Auditor General must...examine, certify and report on the statement of accounts”—

supplied to him by the Delivery Authority—

“and...send a copy of the certified statement...to the Sponsor Body as soon as practicable.”

It is almost unimaginable that that work would not then be subject to questioning in Parliament and via the usual processes that the Public Accounts Committee can use to oversee the work of the NAO.

Meg Hillier rose—

Kevin Foster: As I am referring to the Committee, I will let its Chair intervene.

Meg Hillier: Any parliamentarian can ask the National Audit Office to do a value-for-money study on anything. It is unusual for Departments to ask for work to be done, but it would be normal that the Comptroller and Auditor General made his own decisions. It might be that the Public Accounts Committee requested that. My vision is that we would have regular value-for-money studies on every aspect along the way. A responsible Sponsor Body, which I believe we have—members of it are represented here—would welcome that scrutiny.

Kevin Foster: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments and laying that out. As she rightly says, it would not be for the Government to direct the work of the Public Accounts Committee; that is for the Committee itself. Turning to page 22, it is worth noting that the measure states:

“The Sponsor Body must, in respect of each financial year, lay before Parliament a copy of the certified statement and report sent under sub-paragraph (7)(b).”

It would not only be internal to the Sponsor Body; it would be laid before Parliament as well.

Briefly, in terms of looking at how we achieve value for money, many people across the United Kingdom would be keen to see all the UK involved—I know you, Mr Hanson, will want north Wales to play a firm role. However, people will obviously think, “Is this just about spending money in London?” I am conscious that some people have suggested there should be a mechanism to divide the work across the country, but that would slightly miss the point of the project. When the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly were built, there was not a divvy-up of money across the different parts of the United Kingdom. It reflected the fact that that was a unique project.

8.15 pm

However, that does not mean that money for a project in London needs to be purely spent in London, given the ability to spread procurement across the country and make sure that there is a fair balance across our entire Union. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to consider as a policy suggestion the type of mechanism that we have been discussing; it has not been created before.

The Chair: And the Comptroller and Auditor General having access rights to examine this issue in detail, as in the hon. Lady’s amendment.

Kevin Foster: I thank you for your comments, Mr Hanson. As I say, that is where we are regarding that area.

I fully appreciate the spirit of the amendment and what it is driving at. There will clearly need to be a very strong process of parliamentary scrutiny, including by the NAO and the Comptroller and Auditor General, but there must also be an ability for individual Members to question and hold to account the Sponsor Body on behalf of their constituents. However, at this stage, this would be an unusual amendment to accept, and therefore it is not considered to be the most appropriate course; that is certainly the advice that the Government have received.

Meg Hillier: On the basis of what the Minister has said, I will withdraw this amendment now, but with the right to return to it, perhaps in a simpler form, at a later stage.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 2 agreed to.

Clauses 4 to 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 3

THE PARLIAMENTARY WORKS ESTIMATES COMMISSION

Question proposed, That the schedule be the Third schedule to the Bill.

Chris Bryant: I will not delay the Committee long, Mr Hanson, I promise you, but I want to raise a couple of issues that are important to clarify.

As Members will know, schedule 3 lays out how the Parliamentary Works Estimates Commission will operate. It has only four members and its quorum is two, as long as one Member of the House of Commons and one Member of the House of Lords are present. It makes no provision for who the Chair of that Committee should be, but the Commission is able, if it so chooses, to reject entirely an estimate at any stage through to actual delivery of the project.

I want to know what happens if there are only two people there who have different views and there is no Chair. How will it be decided whether they have agreed or rejected an estimate? Also, does the Commission operate according to House of Commons rules or according to House of Lords rules, because those rules are different in respect of what happens on a tied vote? For that matter, they are also different as to whether the record is kept in Latin or in English.

These may sound like light-hearted comments, but they are important, because it may come to a point where the Sponsor Body is happy with an estimate, but only two members of the Commission turn up, with one of them against and one in favour of the estimate, and we have stalemate, with no means of deciding whether the estimate is to proceed.

I think that setting up a new Commission is unnecessary. What we have done with the Members Estimate Committee is that that is now the House of Commons Commission. It has the same membership; that is laid down in statute. I am ruminating on this subject, and I may table amendments to that effect on Report, but I just wonder whether it would be better for the body that makes this decision to be a Joint Committee of the Finance Committees of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Then, there would at least be a broad range of views from both Houses and an established process, whereby there is a Chair and decisions are reached, even when there is an equality of voices.

Kevin Foster: I have listened, with interest, to the hon. Gentleman’s points. I will certainly be happy to hear more on this point and perhaps I will reflect on the issue, and have some conversations about it, before we get to Report, to see whether there is an appropriate way that we can consider the matter. As always, that is subject to my usual caveat, which is that we want to make sure that this is a practical Bill that provides a framework for the Delivery Authority and the Sponsor Body to get on with delivering the work, which I know the hon. Gentleman is also passionate about achieving.

Question put and agreed to.

Schedule 3 accordingly agreed to.

Clause 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 4 agreed to.

Clauses 10 to 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The Chair: Does the hon. Member for City of Chester wish to press new clause 1 to a Division?

Christian Matheson: We had a discussion and a Division on a similar amendment earlier, so I do not intend to press new clause 1 to a Division at this time.

New Clause 2

REPORT ON DISABLED ACCESS TO THE RESTORED PARLIAMENTARY ESTATE

“(1) The Delivery Authority must publish a report setting out what steps it will take to ensure that the Parliamentary estate, including the restored Palace of Westminster, will be fully accessible to—

- (a) Members of Parliament with disabilities;
- (b) Members of the House of Lords with disabilities;
- (c) visitors with disabilities;
- (d) staff with disabilities; and
- (e) any other person with a disability.

(2) The report under subsection (1) must include—

- (a) reference to accessibility solutions for those with physical disabilities; and
- (b) reference to plans to provide facilities and access for those with non-physical disabilities.

(3) The report under subsection (1) must be laid before both Houses of Parliament.”—(*Christian Matheson.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Christian Matheson: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

We have made excellent progress today and I do not want to detain the Committee much longer. Nevertheless, the question of access to the restored parliamentary estate for people with disabilities is important and deserves consideration. New clause 2 is similar to a couple of the amendments we discussed earlier, in that it requires a report to be published by the Delivery Authority setting out what steps it would take to ensure accessibility to the parliamentary estate.

The new clause is solely focused on ensuring that direct attention is paid to disability access within the restored Palace. Parliament needs to be an accessible and welcoming place for all people, including those with physical and non-physical disabilities. We are pleased that attention has been paid to supporting those with disabilities within the legislation. However, we believe that requesting a report will ensure that disability access is properly investigated and taken into account at every stage of the restoration and renewal process.

I particularly want to look at the question of hidden disabilities. Disability would not necessarily be as grave, in many respects, if we lived in a society that was designed around every ability. In the last 20 years, we have made progress through the Disability Discrimination Acts, but there is further to go. I want to focus on plans to support those with so-called invisible disabilities, but I by no means wish to ignore the accessibility challenges for those who rely on wheelchairs or other forms of mobility assistance.

The parliamentary estate is increasingly accessible, but there is still a long way to go to ensure that the whole estate is open to everyone. Indeed, we know that easier access will benefit almost all of us at some stage

in our lives, whether as a parent pushing a buggy, during pregnancy, or as an older person who is finding steps difficult to manage. We all value effective design for our access needs.

This is an historical building and there will be areas where we simply cannot manage to make physical adaptations to overcome access problems for people with disabilities. To blow the trumpet of my own constituency, Chester is an historical city with Roman, middle ages and civil war history. Much of the city centre is protected as a scheduled ancient monument. Nevertheless, Chester won a European Access City Award, as the most accessible city in Europe, despite those historical constraints. So changes and improvements are possible.

Physical disability access must not be overlooked in the Bill. We hope that the report would allow for a direct and constant focus on the issue. Crucially, it would allow for external experts, such as disability charities, to scrutinise the plans and suggest improvements as we proceed through their development and implementation.

The report would also highlight accessibility issues faced by individuals with non-physical disabilities. It is all too easy to identify an individual with mobility needs, if they have a wheelchair or mobility device, but many common disabilities, such as dyslexia and autism, are unrecognisable by sight. I will be honest with the Committee: I have made that mistake in the past. I have seen somebody coming out of the disabled toilet and thought, “Why have you gone in there? There is nothing wrong with you.” I admit that with great shame. There are disabilities, illnesses and impairments that are not immediately apparent but are just as debilitating and require adaptations as much as those that are immediately evident.

Invisible or hidden disabilities—any physical, mental or emotional impairment that goes largely unnoticed—can include: cognitive impairments; autism; chronic illnesses, such as multiple sclerosis, chronic fatigue and chronic pain; levels of deafness; impaired vision; anxiety; depression; post-traumatic stress disorder; and many others.

Mark Tami: My hon. Friend mentioned visual impairment. Clear glass doors, which we might think are quite nice, are a real hazard for visually impaired people. We need to think about what we are putting in place, to ensure that it works for everybody.

Christian Matheson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Before I started scrutinising the Bill, that would not have occurred to me. Only from listening to the debates was that example brought to my attention. The relevance of the amendment is that the proposed report would demonstrate that we are looking at such issues, and allow external bodies to audit, perfect and improve our proposals.

I emphasise invisible disabilities because they are commonly overlooked when planning for disability access, as my right hon. Friend has pointed out. Specific investigations are required into how we can make the Palace of Westminster and surrounding sites sensitive to disabilities that are not necessarily obvious. For example, architectural consideration must be given to people with learning disabilities or autism. The noisy and busy halls of Westminster can present a challenge

to many individuals. We need to be imaginative in working out how this place can be accessible. For example, specific quiet areas could provide a space for individuals with such needs to learn about Parliament in a comfortable setting.

As I walk around the Palace of Westminster, particularly on non-sitting days, when both Chambers are open to guests, there is a clear lack of seating for those suffering from chronic pain or fatigue, or older guests who might need to rest a little bit more often. Perhaps that could be rectified in the renewal of Parliament. I hope that hon. Members will support the amendment, should I decide to press it to a Division.

Access considerations for every form of disability must be at the forefront of our minds throughout the restoration and renewal process. By preparing a report, we can focus our minds and the minds of those on the Delivery Authority. It will give an opportunity to external bodies, which are experts in these areas, to help and guide us, and to provide new thinking, as thinking develops on how we support people with disabilities.

Tom Brake: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this evening, Mr Hanson. I rise to encourage hon. Members to participate in the different consultative sessions that are taking place for the northern estate programme on issues such as disability. That can feed into the wider considerations on disability that the hon. Member for City of Chester has raised. There are many opportunities for hon. Members to take part. I am afraid that on occasion the response is not overwhelming. It does provide a fantastic opportunity for Members to raise disability issues. Members will be aware that even in Portcullis House there are still issues—for example, for people in wheelchairs there are major problems going through doors. I encourage all Members to participate in the opportunities that are currently available.

Christian Matheson: I want to do the best for disabled visitors, Members and staff, but I do not have that expertise, as I said in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside. Would not publishing such a report allow us to call upon the expertise of external bodies to help us with our thinking on the design?

8.30 pm

Tom Brake: Absolutely. With or without the report, I hope that such engagement will be very much at the heart of the project. We should seek the views of and engage with not only Members, who know how the building currently operates on a daily basis, but those organisations that are specialists on mobility issues or autism, for instance. I am sure that they would want to do that.

Chris Bryant: I agree with the thrust of what everybody is saying, but it is worth bearing in mind that this is a wholesale set of issues, down to the fact that the annunciators are in red and green, which colourblind people will not be able to differentiate between; the lighting in the room is nowhere near good enough for the majority of people who are partially sighted; and the wallpaper and carpets make it very difficult for many people with particular forms of personality disorder.

Tom Brake: I agree entirely. Indeed, in many places in the building some Members are not audible to others. There is a whole range of issues. Some rooms are used for large public events, where people at the back of the room are very unlikely to hear what the person at the front is saying. At the heart of this project, all these issues have to be addressed, which provides Parliament with an opportunity to design a building that is an exemplar in all those respects. I am sure that the Minister will seek to ensure that is the case.

Kevin Foster: I could not have put it better myself. We heard passionate speeches about ensuring that this is a Parliament for all; not only for Members with particular needs, but for those who want to come and be part of the democratic debate that happens here. We can be candid that the vast majority of our facilities are from another era, with regard to disability issues, and not just visible disabilities. The example was given of someone with a wheelchair trying to come through the doors of Portcullis House, or of a child with autism.

One of the most pleasurable experiences I have had here in the past few months—we have all had some perhaps not so pleasant experiences in this place over the past few months—was bringing a group from Combe Pafford School in my constituency, all of whom have autism, and thinking about how we could appropriately have a question and answer session and how we could see around the building. I must mention the look on one staff member's face as we went on to the Terrace and I had to give the briefing that climbing on the wall was probably not the thing to do, given that on the other side is a straight trip to the Thames. However, the joy on those kids' faces as they saw where I could hang my sword, where the Chamber is, where decisions are taken and when they got literally to stand where the Prime Minister stand when answering Prime Minister's questions was an absolute joy to behold. Hopefully we will see more of that in the new building, as well as more accessibility.

I have been very clear that, although this might be a Royal Palace, there will not be Crown immunity from the standard rules on ensuring disabled access; there will be a requirement to consider the legal need to make reasonable adjustments. There will of course be challenges in a grade I listed building, where virtually every corner has history where something significant happened. We will have to balance that against what costs may be attached but also, like anywhere else, what reasonably should happen. We should aim not just to meet legal minimums, but to create an exemplar for accessibility, as was touched on.

Neil Gray: I am heartened to some extent by what the Minister is saying about his expectations for the accessibility of Parliament, but I am concerned, following discussions at various levels, that there will need to be compromises between heritage and accessibility. Surely if our Parliament is not accessible by all, it will struggle to be representative. How far does the Minister expect that the project needs to go to ensure that it complies and can be a fully representative Parliament building?

Kevin Foster: The details will come from the Sponsor Body, but I would expect, when public business is being transacted, that someone with a disability should reasonably be able to observe proceedings, hear them and be part

[Kevin Foster]

of them. They should be able to get to the room concerned, and not by being taken up in a service elevator, which—let us be blunt—is one of the pretty basic arrangements we have had to make to allow some access into the current building.

However, as with other heritage projects, that must be balanced with the fact that, for example, those steps in the Great Hall of Westminster are where Charles I was sentenced to death—they are historic in their own right. There are parts of this building that would be incredibly difficult to alter, but we will not put ourselves on a special pedestal. We will have to make reasonable adjustments, based on the law that exists. I think that getting the maximum level of accessibility possible, while working within the inherent constraints of a grade I listed building, some of which dates back to the middle ages, is something that all hon. Members are passionate about.

I would not describe it as compromising; it is about ensuring that we can balance the needs in this building, so that heritage does not always trump disability and disability works within heritage. As the hon. Member for City of Chester will know, there are some amazing heritage buildings that have found some amazing solutions to provide access to heritage that was not possible before, without compromising its protection. Again, I think we all hope that this project will be the exemplar.

In paragraph 26 of schedule 1, the Sponsor Body is required to produce a report, and I would expect the report to cover matters such as how it is taking forward questions of disability as part of meeting its legal and moral duties. In terms of getting the expertise that hon. Members particularly wished to refer to, the Sponsor Body can establish committees and sub-committees in undertaking its work. Once the Bill has become an Act and the Sponsor Body has been established, it would be a sensible decision for it to look at establishing a committee on disability. Finally, if the Sponsor Body chooses, it can also look to enhance that work with those with outside interests. Although I fully appreciate and support the sentiments that the hon. Member for City of Chester has expressed, I do not think that introducing the new clause would not be appropriate, given what is already in the Bill.

Christian Matheson: I am grateful to the Minister for that response. It is not my intention at this stage to put the matter to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Christian Matheson: On a point of order, Mr Hanson. The Committee's proceedings have gone very well today. I am most grateful to all hon. Members, and particularly to the Minister for the way he has handled this. We have continued largely in a vein of bipartisanship and a desire to get this through. I particularly thank the hon. Members on the Opposition side of the Chamber tonight; I have come to this fairly recently, but it is clear that they have built up a real expertise over a couple of years of this long process, and I know that will be put to good use as the process continues. I thank you, Mr Hanson, the Minister and other hon. Members for helping us to proceed so smoothly.

Kevin Foster: Further to that point of order, Mr Hanson. I echo the thanks of the shadow Minister to all who have served on the Committee this afternoon. It has certainly been an interesting experience for my first Public Bill Committee as a Minister, particularly given the passion and interest—

Tom Brake: They are not all like this.

Kevin Foster: In many ways, I hope they are, because it is quite right that Ministers face challenging questions from hon. Members who are passionately interested in the subject being debated. We may not necessarily all agree on every point, but certainly in this instance we are all very much agreed on the purpose, the direction and the overall desire, through this Bill, for this to be a project that really takes a Parliament that looks to represent all to being a building that is suitable for all, and that is fit and, crucially, safe for the 21st century and the centuries of history that will be created in this building long after today, as our forefathers and mothers have done.

For me, it has been a pleasure to serve on this Committee; I thank you, Mr Hanson, for your chairmanship this afternoon, and Sir Gary for his chairmanship earlier. It has certainly been an experience, and I look forward to when we next debate some of these issues on the Floor of the House, on Report.

The Chair: I am grateful to right hon. and hon. Members, and I shall pass on their thanks to Sir Gary Streeter for his chairmanship.

Bill to be reported, without amendment.

8.40 pm

Committee rose.

Written evidence reported to the House

PBB01 Professor Matthew Flinders, Alexandra Meakin
and Dr Alexandra Anderson, Sir Bernard Crick Centre,
Department of Politics, University of Sheffield

PBB02 Crispin Passmore

PBB03 Historic England

