

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT  
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

## HIGH STREETS (DESIGNATION, REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN) BILL

*Wednesday 13 March 2024*

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CLAUSES 1 TO 6 agree to, some with amendments.  
Bill, as amended, to be reported.

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**not later than**

**Sunday 17 March 2024**

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:***Chair:* SIR CHARLES WALKER

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| † Brereton, Jack ( <i>Stoke-on-Trent South</i> ) (Con)                | † Hunt, Jane ( <i>Loughborough</i> ) (Con)   |
| † Daly, James ( <i>Bury North</i> ) (Con)                             | Jones, Mr Kevan ( <i>North Durham</i> ) (Lab)  |
| Davies-Jones, Alex ( <i>Pontypridd</i> ) (Lab)                        | † Longhi, Marco ( <i>Dudley North</i> ) (Con)  |
| † Everitt, Ben ( <i>Milton Keynes North</i> ) (Con)                   | Paisley, Ian ( <i>North Antrim</i> ) (DUP)   |
| Furniss, Gill ( <i>Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough</i> ) (Lab) | † Robinson, Gavin ( <i>Belfast East</i> ) (DUP)  |
| † Gideon, Jo ( <i>Stoke-on-Trent Central</i> ) (Con)                  | Whitley, Mick ( <i>Birkenhead</i> ) (Lab)  |
| † Grundy, James ( <i>Leigh</i> ) (Con)                                | † Young, Jacob ( <i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities</i> ) |
| Gullis, Jonathan ( <i>Stoke-on-Trent North</i> ) (Con)                |  |
| † Hamilton, Mrs Paulette ( <i>Birmingham, Erdington</i> ) (Lab)       | Bethan Harding, <i>Committee Clerk</i>   |
| † Harrison, Trudy ( <i>Copeland</i> ) (Con)                           | † <b>attended the Committee</b>  |

# Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 13 March 2024

[SIR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

## High Streets (Designation, Review and Improvement Plan) Bill

9.30 am

**The Chair:** Before we begin, I have a few preliminary reminders for the Committee. Please switch electronic devices to silent. No food or drink is permitted during sittings of this Committee, except for the water provided. *Hansard* colleagues would be grateful if Members could email their speaking notes to [hansardnotes@parliament.uk](mailto:hansardnotes@parliament.uk). My selection and grouping for today's meeting is available online and in the room and I have selected the amendments in the name of the Member in charge of the Bill, Jack Brereton.

### Clause 1

#### DESIGNATION OF HIGH STREETS

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I beg to move amendment 1, in clause 1, page 1, line 3, after first "street" insert

“, or a network of streets.”.

*This amendment enables a local authority to designate a network of streets in its area as a single high street for the purposes of the Bill.*

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

Amendment 2, in clause 1, page 1, line 7, leave out from "one" to end of line 8 and insert

“designation under this section that is in force in its area”.

*This amendment removes the upper limit of 3 streets on what a local authority may designate as high streets for the purposes of the Bill.*

Amendment 3, in clause 1, page 1, line 9, after first "street" insert "or network of streets".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 4, in clause 1, page 1, line 10, after "is" insert

“, or (as the case may be) all of the streets comprising the network of streets are.”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 5, in clause 1, page 1, line 11, at end insert "or streets".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 6, in clause 1, page 1, line 12, after first "street" insert "or network of streets".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 7, in clause 1, page 1, line 13, leave out "its importance" and insert

“the importance of the street or streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 8, in clause 1, page 1, line 15, leave out from "Before" to "under" and insert "making a designation".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 9, in clause 1, page 2, line 5, after "day" insert

“, in relation to a local authority.”.

*This amendment clarifies the meaning of "designation day" for the purposes of clause 1(2) of the Bill in the event that clause 1 is not commenced on a single day.*

Amendment 10, in clause 1, page 2, line 6, at end insert

“in relation to that authority”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 9.*

Clause stand part.

Amendment 11, in clause 2, page 2, line 8, at end insert "or network of streets".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 12, in clause 2, page 2, line 10, leave out "and its importance" and insert

“or (as the case may be) all of the streets comprising the network of streets and the importance of the street or streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 13, in clause 2, page 2, line 12, at end insert "or streets".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 14, in clause 2, page 2, line 14, after first "street" insert "or network of streets".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 15, in clause 2, page 2, line 15, at end insert "or network of streets".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 16, in clause 2, page 2, line 19, leave out "designated the street as a high street" and insert

“made the designation under section 1”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 17, in clause 2, page 2, line 21, after "must," insert "at least once".

*This amendment makes clear that a local authority may carry out more than one review of an improvement plan within each 5-year review period if it considers it appropriate to do so.*

Amendment 18, in clause 2, page 2, line 40, after "street" insert "or network of streets".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Clause 2 stand part.

Amendment 19, in clause 3, page 3, line 6, after "1," insert

“or

(b) comprised in a network of streets that is designated as a high street under section 1,”

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 20, in clause 3, page 3, line 7, at end insert "or network of streets".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 21, in clause 3, page 3, line 15, after "street" insert "or network of streets".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 22, in clause 3, page 3, line 16, after "street" insert "or network of streets".

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Clause 3 stand part.

Clauses 4 to 6 stand part.

**Jack Brereton:** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles. I thank all colleagues for serving on the Committee and I am delighted that the Bill has reached this stage. I thank all those who have supported my Bill. In particular, I thank the Minister and the Department for the fantastic support I have received from them; they helped to make this possible. I also thank all the House staff who have supported me in progressing my Bill. I thank the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the British Property Federation, Power to Change and representatives from the Local Government Association Conservative group for meeting me to discuss my Bill and for their support.

Our high streets matter. They matter to our constituents and they matter to us as parliamentarians representing high streets up and down the country. According to data commissioned by Historic England, 73% of people said that their local high street is important to them, but 54% feel pessimistic about its future. The condition of our high streets is intrinsically linked to the success and condition of the communities that surround them. My Bill is about helping to secure the successful future we all want to see for our high streets.

Clause 1 sets out powers for local authorities to designate high streets in their area based on their importance to the local economy and their use. That should be done in consultation with key stakeholders and individuals from the area. This reflects that the fact that in those areas where there is effective partnership, with councils, communities, and high street businesses and property owners coming together, significant progress can be achieved. We are starting to see early signs of what can be achieved in towns such as Longton in my constituency thanks to the work of organisations such as Urban Wilderness and the owners of the Longton Exchange precinct, but we need to go much further to see the transformation necessary to attract new uses to fill those empty spaces and help our high streets to thrive again.

Recognising the success of our high streets will inevitably require change. That is why clause 2 details the need for high street improvement plans that would set out the condition of the high street and its importance to the local economy as well as proposals for its preservation and enhancement.

Sadly, many of our high streets have struggled as a result of the move online and out of town, and the pandemic. We cannot allow that decline to continue. These measures are about helping our high streets to turn the corner and be transformed for the future. They build on measures already introduced by the Government through the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, and powers already in place through a number of other provisions.

Why is it important? Many of these powers, such as the use of section 215 enforcement notices for buildings in a poor state, are not being used to best effect. Despite Government guidance illustrating the important role that such powers can play in achieving wider regeneration of an area, my own local authority, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, did not issue a single 215 notice last year.

As I said on Second Reading, the Bill is about getting local authorities to use the powers that are now in place to get on top of the challenges and to take action on the issues that are important to high street users or that bring in new uses. By putting in place a duty to create high street improvement action plans, we can help bring

forward the change and better co-ordination that are needed. Ensuring full engagement and consultation with key high street and town centre stakeholders is essential, so the development of action plans must bring people and organisations together to deliver the transformation that many of our high streets need.

Clause 3 sets out the due regard that local authorities should give to improvement plans as part of the planning process, but is designed so as not to be restrictive. It is certainly not about preventing positive new development on our high streets that might not have been considered when an improvement plan was put together. Instead, it is about ensuring that consideration is given to the context of improvement plans in determining permission for new development. The granting of planning permission, as per the normal planning process, will remain entirely at the discretion of local authorities. Additionally, improvement plans are not designed to duplicate existing planning policies, such as local or neighbourhood plans, but should complement them.

Clause 4 sets out the powers necessary for the Secretary of State to make regulations that may be necessary for the implementation of clauses 1 to 3. Clause 5 provides definitions for the interpretation of the Bill, and clause 6 focuses on the extent and commencement of the Bill.

As Members will be aware, I have tabled several amendments, mainly to tidy up and improve the clarity of the legislation. A number of them are also consequential on one another. I will focus on a few of them. First, amendment 1 and its related amendments would allow for a network of streets to be considered as the high street area, rather than just a single street. That picks up on the points made on Second Reading by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North and the hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) about ensuring that the definition of “high street” reflects that that is often made up of a collection of streets, rather than just a single street.

Amendment 2 would address some of the concerns expressed about the upper limit on the number of designations a local authority may make. Originally, it was intended that there should be a minimum of one and a maximum of three. That was done to ensure the number of designations did not become too onerous on local authorities. However, following discussions with the Department and a number of colleagues and others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough, who is serving with us on the Committee today, it has been agreed that we should remove the upper limit and give discretion to local authorities. Importantly, that reflects the fact that we have local authorities of varying sizes, with some having many more high streets than others.

Amendment 9 is merely a clarifying amendment for the meaning of “designation day”. Finally, amendment 17 is about the frequency of reviews of designated high street improvement plans. While the Bill sets out that reviews must take place within a five-year period, amendment 17 makes clear that local authorities can review plans more frequently if they choose to and make any necessary or desirable changes sooner than five years.

To conclude, my Bill will make a significant difference in helping to support our high streets to thrive again, helping to stem the tide of decline that has all too frequently been experienced across the country by putting

[Jack Brereton]

a duty on local authorities to define high streets, assess their condition and devise improvement plans to help them to improve and to provide the focus needed to succeed. That will influence the effective partnership and co-ordinated action that will help our high streets to attract in new uses, to improve the condition of our high street buildings and to encourage more people to visit and support our local high streets so that they thrive again.

**Mrs Paulette Hamilton** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles. I rise to agree with much of what has already been said. I truly appreciate and support the aims of this Bill and in particular clause 2 and the duty on local authorities to create high street improvement plans. I thank the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South for bringing the Bill forward.

I have been an MP for two years now, and our high street in Erdington is one of the main concerns of my local residents. High streets are the beating heart of our communities, linking people to every part of their lives, whether that is walking to school, buying their shopping, going to church, visiting a friend, going to the pub or going out for a cup of coffee. But up and down the country, high streets are frankly in a sorry state. That is why I strongly support clause 2(1)(b), which places a duty on local authorities to create a plan that preserves and enhances our streets.

I have lived in Erdington for 36 years. I remember raising my family in a town where everything we needed and everyone we wanted to see could be found on the high street. I have received a number of comments from constituents who have contacted me since the beginning of the year.

“After seeing details on the Next-door app regarding an 87 year old man being badly beaten up and personal items taken from him outside Erdington library, I’m really really scared to get myself out. I would not be able to protect myself like this gentleman did.”

Another comment said:

“As a constituent and a person who works in the area it’s concerning to see the frequency of anti-social behaviour increasing in Erdington high street. Most recently, we’ve had the window smashed in Costa, physical assault and robbery near the library and physical assault outside WHSmith.”

Another said:

“I know Erdington missed out on the levelling up grant twice and I know there was a very ambitious regeneration plan drawn up and Erdington is not alone with this decline in the issues of the high street, but surely something can be done to regenerate it and stop the decline.”

It is a real shame that Erdington has twice been rejected from the levelling-up fund, despite two great bids that would have transformed our area.

It would be remiss of me not to highlight how worrying it is that the Bill is needed in the first place. Local people need to see improvements in their high streets, but, with eight local authorities having issued a section 114 notice since 2018, and the £4 billion hole in council funding arrangements for the next year, I worry that by designating this power and responsibility to local authorities, we are letting the Government off on failing to properly fund the regeneration of our high streets.

I recognise that the Bill comes with a money resolution, but I want to place on record my view that the money to preserve and enhance the high streets that are at the heart of our communities should not have come from a private Member’s Bill, but from the Government themselves. Let me end on a positive and bipartisan note by sincerely thanking the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South for bringing forward this Bill. I hope it will serve to improve our high streets for generations to come.

**Jane Hunt** (Loughborough) (Con): It is an absolute delight to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) for bringing forward this excellent Bill. The key word in the title of the Bill is “improvement” and, in my view, that is something we need on all levels. I see this more as a matrix that would bring forward all sorts of improvements to a town centre.

I will talk about Loughborough and Shepshed, because I have two towns in my constituency. Shepshed has recently received a large amount of section 106 funding, which has helped to improve the centre of the town, where there is new paving. That took a while to deliver, but it has lifted the town centre enormously, and Brook Street looks absolutely beautiful now.

9.45 am

We need to create a post-internet town centre for all the town centres throughout the country. Before the internet, people were prepared to walk around and browse a great deal and travel further along the town to get what they wanted. We need to create town centres that are more of a destination for entertainment, as well as for shopping and all the other social life aspects of a town centre, because that way we get a smaller footprint and a greater concentration of shops and facilities in an area, and the Bill will help to create that. I can see a future now for our town centres.

Through working with organisations such as business improvement districts—Love Loughborough, for example, is a superb organisation within the town centre—the Bill will help create an even greater focus on certain streets within a BID area. Of course, it is not about just the shopping area and the town centre itself, but picking out a certain street within the town, such as Nottingham Road, which is between Loughborough’s town centre and the station. We had an awful lot of investment in the station area when my noble Friend Baroness Morgan of Cotes was the Member of Parliament, and she attracted that funding. We then have the town centre, but in between there is a bit of a desert, and we need to be able to create something better. The Bill creates a good opportunity for that.

Creating that destination and looking at it as a matrix is not just about the shop frontage or the shops themselves, although those are extremely important, but about the state of the street and the places above those shops. That empty space can be used for flats and offices and so on, creating a whole ecosystem from just one street. The five-year focus on just one area will help to create a proper plan that everybody knows about and a proper strategy for that area, with everybody having a responsibility to help and engage with that, such as the police and providers of other facilities.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington mentioned antisocial behaviour, which can often deter older people from coming into town later in the evening, for example. Something can be done there. A particular street can change from daytime shopping to the evening. In Loughborough, that is when students come out and have a great time, frankly. In the meantime, there is a 5 pm to 10 pm twilight zone of tumbleweed, where not so many people are out and about. I would like to do something about that for people who are more my age, sadly, and a little bit older. They like to go out, have something to eat and drink, and then go back home before the night-time economy starts. I would like to be able to see that.

The Bill helps with those things, and it is absolutely superb. By being able to identify the landlords in a particular street, we can work with them to help promote any empty shops, perhaps with lower rents or rent-free periods. That kind of thing would also create the better promotion of an area. We have larger shops that were Woolworths or Wilkinson's, but perhaps now we need smaller shops. If we did something along the lines of converting those larger shops, that would bring investment into towns.

All these things will create a particular focus, along with the high street rental auctions and so on that are already offered by the Minister and the Department. That variety and that opportunity will be absolutely superb. It certainly will be for Loughborough and Shephed, and I am sure it will be for other towns across the country.

**Jo Gideon** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): I rise to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South, my constituency neighbour, on this outstanding Bill. As he and I well know, Stoke-on-Trent is a classic example of why amendment 1 is so important, because it allows for more than three streets to be designated. Stoke-on-Trent is a city of six towns, each with its own identity and network of streets, and it is hugely important that the symbiotic relationship of streets is recognised by designating networks.

We all know that regenerating one street often attracts retailers to it, and the neighbouring street may then suffer and see shops closing. It is very important that we look at our high streets and our town and city centres holistically, and the Bill goes a long way towards doing that. I am absolutely supportive and I congratulate my hon. Friend again.

**James Grundy** (Leigh) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South on bringing forward this important piece of legislation. My constituency has a number of towns, and I am pleased to be speaking in the 125th anniversary year of the creation of the county borough of Leigh, which was granted its own town charter in 1899. We hope that in future Leigh will once again have its own borough.

The towns in my constituency have benefited from various schemes that the Government have introduced. I think particularly of the Tyldesley heritage action zone, which has regenerated Elliott Street in Tyldesley and has been held up nationally as an example of how to work with the community in developing and regenerating some of our northern post-industrial towns.

At the other end of the constituency is Golborne, where we need to do a lot of work on redesignating the high street because we are submitting our final bid to reopen Golborne station, which is just off the high street, and I suspect there will be much more footfall there in years to come. Hopefully the station will be up and running by 2027, meaning that Golborne will once again see life to it after more than 60 years without a railway station.

Leigh itself has benefited from the levelling-up fund. We have had £11.4 million, although sadly not the full £20 million because, as the Minister knows, Wigan Council failed to bid for the full amount, leaving £8.6 million on the table that is not benefiting one of the poorest towns in the north of England. However, I am pleased to say that we have had the full £20 million of future towns funding, which I very much welcome. There is a lot of work to do in Leigh, including the regeneration of Leigh market just off Bradshawgate, Bradshawgate itself and the town square outside the town hall. Many of those schemes have cross-party support and the support of a number of community organisations such as Leigh Township Forum.

My hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough mentioned the post-internet town centre. I pay tribute to Leigh Means Business, which is one of the community organisations that have been trying to drive regeneration in the town of Leigh and which has come up with a website—I hesitate to call it an app, because I am not that technologically minded—that lists all the shops in the town centre and what they provide to local residents. It will come up on people's phones if they are in a local shop and they have downloaded it—or that is the intention—and say, "Are you also looking for this thing?", and link to something in a nearby shop that provides that good or service. I warmly welcome what my hon. Friend said.

The designation of a high street is important. I would be remiss if I failed to mention the town of Atherton—I currently have the bottom half of it in my constituency, and after the boundary review I will hopefully have the entirety of it—which in many ways led the way in our borough on small town high street regeneration. That has been done in a very piecemeal manner by the independent councillors, with the support of local businesses, but in many ways what we saw in Atherton was a beta test for what worked and what did not.

My constituency has a number of towns that all benefit from the regeneration that the Government have brought forward, and the various moneys associated with that, but I welcome the deliberate designation of specific streets within town centres as high streets. It is important to target that funding carefully and designate zones for specific actions. With that, I feel I have made my point and will sit down, but I strongly welcome the measures in the Bill.

**James Daly** (Bury North) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Charles. I warmly welcome the Bill, but may I make one point? With everything that we ever talk about in this place, it normally comes down to the Government or the state doing everything. If people do not have pride in their area, if people do not care about their fellow citizens or the town or place where they live, and if people cannot behave in a way that is not yobbish or does not intimidate

[James Daly]

other people, this will not work. I find it incredibly tiresome to hear people throwing numbers up in the air and saying, “If we invest this amount of money, then suddenly a miracle will happen and everything will be fine.” It will not. People have to behave and they have to have pride in their area and care about it. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South does and that that underpins this Bill.

**The Chair:** Would any other colleagues like to speak before I call the Minister?

**Marco Longhi** (Dudley North) (Con): Thank you, Sir Charles. I had not indicated that I wished to speak, but I want to add a couple of things.

I very much welcome the Bill and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South for bringing it forward. Dudley high street and those in a couple of peripheral areas in my constituency, Sedgley and Gornal, suffer from what most high streets have suffered from since the advent of the tsunami that the digital age brought with it. I suspect that each and every one of us in this room is guilty of contributing, in our own small way, to their gradual demise, which was unfortunately super-accelerated by covid, when everybody was asked to operate from home and therefore through their laptops, and everything was delivered to our doorsteps.

I do think that local councils need help—they have needed it for some time—but I also think that local government should be doing more anyway. In Dudley I have argued for a masterplan for our town centre, which is effectively what the Bill asks for. If it becomes the adopted policy of local councils, they can decide how many pound shops, charity shops and fish and chip shops they want on their high street. As things stand, if a particular building has a particular planning designation, there could be 20 of each—I might mention Turkish barber shops that do not have many Turkish people in them.

This is a good Bill and I warmly support it, for the reasons I have given. It strikes the right balance between what my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North indicated—let us take back some pride in our high streets—and some of the extra motivation that I think local government needs.

**The Chair:** Are all colleagues happy? Right. I call the Minister.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Jacob Young):** Thank you, Sir Charles. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I am grateful for the leadership of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South on this issue, and I am pleased to speak in the Committee on this important Bill.

As my hon. Friend laid out, the Bill will ensure that local authorities effectively use their powers to support high streets in their areas to perform well, and to drive improvements where that is not the case. This will be a valuable tool in enabling us to meet our ambition of creating thriving high streets and town centres. I am sure it will come as no surprise to my hon. Friend that I

support all the amendments he has tabled. They are largely technical in nature, but they are important to ensure that the Bill has its intended effect of strengthening high streets across the country.

Clause 1 introduces a new duty on local authorities to designate high streets in their area, meaning that local authorities will need to carefully consider and identify streets of specific economic, social and cultural importance in their area that may require particular attention to ensure that they are performing well.

Amendments 1 and 3 to 8 will ensure that local authorities are able to designate a network of streets in their area, as well as a single street or part of a street, as a high street for the purposes of the Bill. That will ensure that high streets made up of a crossroads or a flow of streets are not overlooked or misrepresented. While technical in nature, the amendments are important to the Bill’s effectiveness and reflective of how people view their high street. They will mean that streets such as Nottingham Road, between Loughborough town centre and the station, could be brought into scope. In my constituency, they will mean that the High Street in Redcar can also include Station Road and Queen Street.

10 am

Amendment 2 will remove the Bill’s upper limit on the number of high streets that a local authority can designate, which is currently set at three. Under the amendment, each local authority will be required to designate at least one high street in their area. Although the Government are clear that designations should be focused on those high streets that would benefit the most from an improvement plan, we recognise that many local authorities will have a large number of high streets in their area and it would be inappropriate for us to prevent them from designating more high streets if they wish to.

The change will mean that in Bury they could also choose Ramsbottom; in Dudley they could choose Sedgley; in Loughborough they could choose Shepshed; in Leigh they could choose Atherton or Golborne; in Copeland they could choose Whitehaven or Millom; and in Milton Keynes they could choose Olney or Newport Pagnell. We have also heard about Erdington in the constituency of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington. In the great city of Stoke-on-Trent, the council would be able to choose Hanley as well as other town centres in Burslem and, of course, Longton in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South.

The Government have committed to funding the cost of up to three designations per local authority. The Bill will allow local authorities to designate further high streets on a voluntary basis. However, there is no expectation that local authorities should do so and they will need to fund the costs of designating and developing improvement plans for any high streets beyond three.

Finally on clause 1, amendments 9 and 10 will clarify the meaning of “designation day” in the Bill. If the clause is not commenced on the same day for every local authority, the Bill requires local authorities to maintain the stipulated number of high street designations on designation day and at all times afterwards. Designation day will be six months after the relevant section of the Bill comes into force, which may be different for different local authorities as the Secretary of State may commence

the clause on different days for different purposes or areas. This will ensure that there is flexibility around the commencement of the provisions in case that is needed.

Clause 2 sets out the requirement, content and process by which local authorities must prepare and publish an improvement plan for any street that has been designated as a high street. An improvement plan should include information about the condition of the street and its importance to the local economy, as well as proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the street. It must be reviewed every five years.

Amendments 11 to 16 will ensure that the provisions in clause 2 apply to a network of streets, as well as to a single street, and amendment 17 will also apply to the clause. Currently, the Bill requires local authorities to review improvement plans once within each five-year period, beginning with the day the final version of the plan is published. It also allows local authorities to vary a designation; this is separate from the requirement to review designations and may include expanding or reducing the area of a designated high street. However, if a local authority varies a designation, there is currently no requirement to review the improvement plan associated with it, which means there could be a considerable period between the designation being varied and a plan being reviewed. To ensure that improvement plans remain relevant and meaningful documents without placing over-onerous requirements on local authorities, amendment 17 requires local authorities to review improvement plans at least once in every five-year period.

Clause 3 will create a duty on local authorities to have regard to the relevant improvement plan when exercising planning functions that may affect a designated high street in their area. This duty will support the already strong protections for mixed-use high streets through the planning system, complementing the tools already available to local authorities. Amendments 18 to 22 will ensure that the provisions apply to a network of streets, as well as to a single street, as is the case for clauses 1 and 2.

Clause 4 gives the Secretary of State the power to make regulations for the purposes of clauses 1 to 3, and sets out the procedure by which such regulations should be made. Clause 5 provides definitions for words and phrases in the Bill, and clause 6 sets out the Bill's territorial extent, commencement and short title.

Overall, the Bill will ensure that local authorities effectively support high streets in their area. Ensuring that everyone has access to a high street they are proud of is a key priority for this Government, so we are happy to support the Bill, which will sit alongside our other interventions on high streets, such as the long-term plan for towns and the high streets task force.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South on introducing the Bill. It was his idea because of his drive to ensure that high streets in his constituency, such as in Longton, are improved for the benefit of their communities. He could not be a better champion for his constituents. The Bill is testament to that and to his efforts to improve high streets across the country. I am grateful to him, and I reiterate the Government's full support for the Bill.

**Jack Brereton:** I thank the Minister for his kind words and for some of the comments that he made. I agree with him entirely that the amendments are very

much about ensuring that the Bill is reflective of how people feel about their high streets, and that it is complementary to much of the work the Government are doing already to support the revival of our high streets.

I thank all Committee members for serving and supporting me with my Bill, and for their comments. I will go through some of them. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington mentioned the importance of the high street to her constituency and community, and some of the issues with crime and antisocial behaviour that she has seen in her community. I am absolutely attuned to those issues, having seen similar things in many of the communities and high streets in my area. The impact that has on people being able to go to high streets and feel safe is particularly important. Some of the Government's work on the safer streets fund is particularly important to reference, because it can make a massive difference in trying to make areas feel more safe. In Longton in my constituency, we have secured considerable amounts of money through the safer streets fund to invest in safety improvements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough talked about the impacts of online and the internet, which have had such a significant effect. My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North also mentioned that. It is essential that we take action to address some of those issues and bring people together to create a destination, as my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough described, not just for traditional retail but for entertainment. She also mentioned the important role of BIDs, which will be integral and play a key role in parts of this legislation. They will be one of the key partners that can help to formulate the improvement plans.

I thank my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central for her points, particularly about amendments 1 and 2 and why they are important for our city, which is because we are a city made up of six towns, all with unique identities. She also mentioned the importance of not causing displacement from one part of a high street to another, which is why the amendments are so important.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh, who made some extremely important points about his constituency and the benefits that heritage action zones have brought. I have seen that in my own constituency and across Stoke-on-Trent. They are particularly important and can play a significant role, because many of our high streets contain so much important heritage. My hon. Friend also mentioned the importance of cross-party working and the work he has done on Golborne station. I recall that that was reflected by the Labour Mayor of Greater Manchester, who complimented my hon. Friend on the incredible and instrumental work he has done to progress that project. Even the Labour Mayor of Greater Manchester thinks he is doing a fantastic job.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North, who mentioned the importance of the Bill being about not just local authorities. He is absolutely right: this is about not just local authorities. Although they can perform a co-ordinating role, it is about trying to get businesses, communities, property owners and all those who care deeply about their high streets to be involved in the process and to formulate plans.

Finally, I want to reflect further on the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North. He illustrated the importance of having a masterplan for

[Jack Brereton]

an area to the rebirth and rejuvenation of our high streets. It can play such an integral role. I hope the efforts we are making through this Bill will help to deliver that. Without further ado, I ask the Committee to accept amendment 1.

**The Chair:** We now need an outbreak, or a continuation, of good humour and patience from the Committee, because, funnily enough, we have a lot to get through.

*Amendment 1 agreed to.*

*Amendments made:* 2, in clause 1, page 1, line 7, leave out from “one” to end of line 8 and insert “designation under this section that is in force in its area”.

*This amendment removes the upper limit of 3 streets on what a local authority may designate as high streets for the purposes of the Bill.*

Amendment 3, in clause 1, page 1, line 9, after first “street” insert “or network of streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 4, in clause 1, page 1, line 10, after “is” insert

“, or (as the case may be) all of the streets comprising the network of streets are,”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 5, in clause 1, page 1, line 11, at end insert “or streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 6, in clause 1, page 1, line 12, after first “street” insert “or network of streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 7, in clause 1, page 1, line 13, leave out “its importance” and insert

“the importance of the street or streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 8, in clause 1, page 1, line 15, leave out from “Before” to “under” and insert “making a designation”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 9, in clause 1, page 2, line 5, after “day” insert

“, in relation to a local authority,”.

*This amendment clarifies the meaning of “designation day” for the purposes of clause 1(2) of the Bill in the event that clause 1 is not commenced on a single day.*

Amendment 10, in clause 1, page 2, line 6, at end insert

“in relation to that authority”.—(Jack Brereton.)

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 9.*

*Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 2

### HIGH STREET IMPROVEMENT PLANS

*Amendments made:* 11, in clause 2, page 2, line 8, at end insert “or network of streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 12, in clause 2, page 2, line 10, leave out “and its importance” and insert

“or (as the case may be) all of the streets comprising the network of streets and the importance of the street or streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 13, in clause 2, page 2, line 12, at end insert “or streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 14, in clause 2, page 2, line 14, after first “street” insert “or network of streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 15, in clause 2, page 2, line 15, at end insert “or network of streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 16, in clause 2, page 2, line 19, leave out “designated the street as a high street” and insert

“made the designation under section 1”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 17, in clause 2, page 2, line 21, after “must,” insert “at least once”.

*This amendment makes clear that a local authority may carry out more than one review of an improvement plan within each 5-year review period if it considers it appropriate to do so.*

Amendment 18, in clause 2, page 2, line 40, after “street” insert “or network of streets”.—(Jack Brereton.)

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

*Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 3

### PLANNING FUNCTIONS: DUTY TO HAVE REGARD TO HIGH STREET IMPROVEMENT PLANS

*Amendments made:* 19, in clause 3, page 3, line 6, after “1,” insert “or

(b) comprised in a network of streets that is designated as a high street under section 1,”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 20, in clause 3, page 3, line 7, at end insert “or network of streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 21, in clause 3, page 3, line 15, after “street” insert “or network of streets”.

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

Amendment 22, in clause 3, page 3, line 16, after “street” insert “or network of streets”.—(Jack Brereton.)

*See explanatory statement to Amendment 1.*

*Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 4 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Question proposed,* That the Chair do report the Bill, as amended, to the House.

**Jack Brereton:** I thank you, Sir Charles, and everybody who has taken part in the debate today. It has been a fantastic and wide-ranging debate, and I hope that we can move forward as swiftly as possible, with Report stage on 26 April.

**The Chair:** Would anybody like to thank the officials?

**Jack Brereton:** I thank the officials.

**Jacob Young:** I would like to thank the officials.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill, as amended, accordingly to be reported.*

10.13 am

*Committee rose.*