MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 16 May 2001
(*Afternoon*)

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 16 May 2001

(*Afternoon*)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Our first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. We welcome today the convener of Action of Churches Together in Scotland, Sister Maire Gallagher.

Sister Maire Gallagher (Action of Churches Together in Scotland): The manner of my introduction is one of the good-news items I should like to offer for reflection today. Although I am a Roman Catholic sister of Notre Dame, I am also convener of the council of the eight churches working together ecumenically in Scotland.

Sectarianism surfaces in our country in both predictable and unexpected ways, and its ugliness brings an urgency to our prayers and discussions together about how to tackle it. Politicians, sporting authorities and many people of good will join the churches in rejecting bigotry. It is more than time to move on from the past.

There is no doubt that the hopes kindled when this Parliament opened in 1999 have built a confidence among Christians that now is a time for prayer and action together to make Scotland a more tolerant place for all.

In Ecclesiastes, the book of wisdom, we read:

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

A time to be born and a time to die ... a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up ... a time to keep silence and a time to speak."

A time to speak came in this very place in 1995 when the moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland invited Archbishop Winning to address the General Assembly. Cardinal Winning spoke about the assembly seeking the well-being of the nation, not just the Church of Scotland, and added:

"My vision looks to the day when the entire Christian family in Scotland will gather together in Assembly such as this ... All Scottish Christians and all people of goodwill ... for a new beginning together."

I have another item of good news. This September just such an assembly of the churches and all our partners in the nation will gather in Edinburgh. Our theme is breaking new ground, and our hope is that it will be a time for showing that Christians are breaking down barriers and looking to a better future together.

Let us pray.

Lord bless all the women and men of this Scottish Parliament as they strive to make Scotland a better place for all its people.

Bless all those who will participate in the first Scottish ecumenical assembly and grant that it may be a time for healing and for building a renewed church in a renewed nation for a new century.

Architecture and the Built Environment

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Our main item of business today is a debate on motion S1M-1929, in the name of Allan Wilson, on architecture and the built environment.

14:35

The Deputy Minister for Sport, the Arts and Culture (Allan Wilson): I welcome the opportunity that the next 20 minutes or so affords to open this debate on the role of architecture and the built environment in our national life. The subject area is important, but all too often neglected as a matter for debate. It is neglected, perhaps, because buildings are so fundamental to our lives that we often take them for granted and regard them as simply the given backdrop to our day-to-day existence. However, buildings are not given, but consciously made and the way in which they are made has a profound effect on the quality of all our lives. The way in which buildings are made—the quality of their design and of the built environments that they help to shape—should therefore be a matter of concern for us all.

We believe that those are matters for concern, which is why we have made our commitment to develop the first national policy on architecture for Scotland. We believe that the quality of our buildings and of the built environments that they help to shape is of profound importance to Scotland. We believe that good building design and good architecture can bring benefits to people, both as individuals and as communities. We also believe that good architecture can help to meet a range of our social, cultural, environmental and economic objectives.

Because buildings are so fundamental to our lives, we relate to them and they serve us in many and complex ways. Their primary purpose is essentially practical. Buildings provide us with shelter and protect us from the climate; they keep us warm in winter and cool in summer; they provide the space for our activities and our belongings; and they deliver the services, heat, light and water that are necessary to sustain our lives. Nevertheless, what we seek from buildings is not always practical. We also expect our buildings to respond to and sustain our social and cultural needs and aspirations. Those needs and aspirations may be private and intimate, such as our desire for a sense of security and well-being in our homes, or public and symbolic, such as the need to express a sense of cultural and national identity in our civic buildings. When buildings respond to those needs and aspirations—when they provide us with more than mere utility—they become memorable places that enrich our lives.

Buildings are important not simply because, individually, they house our activities and meet our practical needs. They are also important because, collectively, they define and shape our towns and cities and irrevocably alter the character of our landscapes. Just as buildings can bring order, meaning and value to our activities as individuals, so our collective existence is made more or less humane by the physical quality of our urban and rural environments. That physical quality of our towns, cities and countryside is important not just for our own well-being, but because of what it tells others about us. We, as a nation, are largely defined in the imagination of others by our towns, cities and landscapes, and Scotland is fortunate in having townscapes and natural landscapes of world renown and of the highest quality. All our buildings, therefore, have a critical role to play in maintaining and enhancing the quality of Scotland's urban and rural places.

When we build, we have a responsibility to respond not simply to what exists and what has come to us from the past, but to the future. The buildings that shape our towns and cities are tangible evidence of the social and cultural values and traditions of past generations. The buildings that we make will mostly outlive us and become our legacy for the future. They will provide the means by which future generations will judge our collective values and ambitions. We should, therefore, strive to ensure that the buildings that we leave to the future will not become a burden to coming generations, but will be regarded with affection and as worthy of preservation. John Ruskin put that obligation to the future rather well when he wrote:

> "When we build, let us think that we build for ever. Let it not be for present delight, nor for present use alone; let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for".

Buildings are of profound importance in our lives and our communities. They not only serve our present and practical needs, but link us with our past and lay the foundation for our future. Therein lies one of the great challenges of building design—how best to mediate between the past and the future in a way that properly serves and reflects our present. The purpose of architecture is to take up that challenge; to bring imagination to the solution of our practical problems; to make buildings memorable and enjoyable places that reflect what is of value in our lives; to reshape for the better our towns, cities and landscapes; and to contribute to the maintenance of a built heritage of lasting value.

Good architecture has the potential to deliver much by way of benefits, which I shall set out in terms of their social, cultural, environmental and

economic value. The social benefits of architecture derive from the essential purpose of all buildings—to provide for the many and changing needs of our society. We need decent homes, places of education, health care facilities, offices and factories, places for leisure and recreation, theatres, galleries and museums. Our primary expectation of all our buildings is that they should be practical and efficient. They should be adequate for their purpose and suitably planned. They should provide a healthy environment and warmth, light and shade. They should be free from defects, robust and easy to maintain. They should be flexible and accessible to all.

Those are the requirements and benefits of good building. However, good architecture can deliver more than just good building. Through good, imaginative design, architecture can provide housing that meets the many needs of family life, creates opportunities for encounter and social interaction and strengthens community life. It can provide places of education that support good teaching, encourage concentration and are good places in which to study and learn. It can make health buildings that give reassurance and dignity to those who are ill and provide a comfortable and comforting environment in which to recover from sickness. It can make cultural buildings that celebrate the richness of our arts and culture and allow us to experience and understand life more fully. It can make civic buildings that provide a focus for, and are potent symbols of, our collective aspirations.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the architecture of modern times has been the way in which it has sought to reaffirm that social purpose of building.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): This is a fascinating thesis—I congratulate whoever wrote it—but, so far, we have had six and a half minutes of it without hearing what the Executive's policy might be. Perhaps the Executive's policy is to have a thesis on architecture. It would be nice to know what the policy is that we are meant to be celebrating today.

Allan Wilson: I made reference to the four policy areas to which good architecture contributes: environmental, cultural, social and economic policy. In the next 15 or so minutes, I intend to refer in greater detail to those areas.

Through good building design, modern architecture has sought to provide environments in which people can live and work more enjoyably and efficiently and which encourage social and working communities to flourish. That ability of good architecture to deliver social benefit is vital if we are to meet our objectives for an inclusive society that provides opportunity for all. I believe that our ability to meet those social objectives will depend, to a large extent, on the quality of the built environments that we make.

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): Does the minister agree that design standards in the affordable housing sector show distinct promise and often exceed the standards of the private sector? Does the Executive's national policy on architecture include a proposal to lay down indicative or compulsory guidelines for space and design standards in private sector development?

Allan Wilson: A policy document that will address those issues will succeed this debate.

I want to consider the cultural benefits of good architecture. As I have said, good building design goes beyond the merely practical and provides more than mere utility. At best, architecture is an art and a profoundly important expression of our culture. We can experience and enjoy architecture as art on a number of levels. A building may give us practical satisfaction in the way that it fulfils its purpose, in its arrangement of function, in the efficiency of its services and in the skills that are evident in its assembly and detail. However, architecture has a further, deeper, cultural value. Architecture both shapes, and is shaped by, the society and place in which it is made. As I suggested, the existing architecture and buildings of our towns, cities and rural settlements are a repository of our common culture and heritage. They provide continuity and a unique sense of history and tradition. A nation's architecture says much about how that nation is organised, how its society works and what its values and ambitions are. When we make buildings, we have an opportunity not only to connect with our past, but to assert our present cultural values and to say something about who we are at this time and in this place.

Good building design does not only have social and cultural value; it can also deliver environmental benefits. Buildings, by their nature, are interventions in the natural world. They consume energy, materials and natural resources in their construction and use; they generate waste and contribute to atmospheric pollution, ozone depletion and hence to climate change. The way in which we build now locks us into future patterns of resource use, waste emissions and corresponding patterns of environmental degradation. Buildings have a critical role to play in meeting our objectives for sustainable development. Those objectives, which set a new and challenging agenda for architecture, demand that we think anew about the way in which we design and manage our built environments. If we are to meet that challenge and ensure that we have a sustainable future, we need the

imagination and vision in the making of buildings that only good architecture can bring.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): What steps is the Scottish Executive taking to ensure that good architecture is not achieved through exploitation of underpaid workers, at home or abroad? Will the minister comment on reports that some of the important materials for the new Parliament building at Holyrood have been produced by workers who are on almost slave rates of labour?

Allan Wilson: I decline to comment on the latter question, which is a matter not for the Scottish Executive, but for the Holyrood progress group.

I agree with the member's substantive point—the Executive's policy, when it is produced, will ensure that sustainable development is at the heart of our future architecture policy. Critical to that is the fact that price would not be the only factor in determining what constitutes good architectural design.

The social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits of good building design make a compelling case for the value of architecture and for architecture being a matter of policy. However, some people—not here, I hope—will suggest that Government should have no role in relation to architecture. They will say that the kind of buildings we get is entirely a matter for those who commission them; that building is a commodity determined by market forces; and that Government intervention will lead only to some sterile notion of good taste. We do not accept those views; we believe that they both trivialise the purpose of architecture and misunderstand our intentions. We believe that Government should have an interest in architecture and a responsibility for the promotion of architecture, for three principal reasons. First, architecture is part of, and contributes to, our nation's heritage. Secondly, architecture is a cultural activity. Thirdly, building is one of the key delivery mechanisms for policies that are aimed at improving social development and modernising the nation's services and infrastructure.

For many policy issues, such as social exclusion, homelessness and crime, and in many policy areas, such as housing, health, education, sustainability and industry, the quality of our architecture and of the built environment that it helps to shape are major determinants of successful policy implementation. Without the capacity of architecture to create coherent, humane and sustainable environments, our expectations for successful policy implementation would be reduced.

We are not alone in thinking that Governments should have an interest in architecture. Many of our European neighbours, particularly the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, have recognised the importance of building design and the built environment to their social, cultural and economic life. We have learned much from those developments and have been informed by them.

At the end of 1999, we published a framework document entitled "The Development of a Policy on Architecture for Scotland". That document set out, in greater detail than I am able to provide today, the value and benefits of good architecture and the reasons why good building design is important to us all. The document also set out what the Executive can do to promote good architecture and the range of issues that policy might address.

The framework document invited views and comments, on both its general content and the proposed framework for policy development. Following publication of the document, a series of public meetings was held to canvass views. At the end of last year, I published a report on that public consultation exercise. In general, there was widespread support for our proposal to develop an architecture policy for Scotland. There was welcome for the Executive's recognition of both the importance to society of the built environment and, in particular, the relationship of architecture to public policy objectives. There was general agreement that the document provided a sound basis from which to develop policy.

Since last year's consultation exercise, we have been working on the development of the detail of the policy. The reasons that I gave at the outset of my speech for our decision to make a commitment to develop a national policy on architecture were, in many ways, quite simple. That is not to say that good architecture is simply achieved—it is not. The making of buildings—the creation of a decent built environment—is a complex activity and we recognise that the development of policy will not be an easy task or achieved in the short term.

The design and construction of buildings involves many participants, who may have differing, often conflicting, objectives. Its processes are regulated and bound by statutory and contractual obligations, and it takes place in a competitive market economy. Building is a costly activity, which takes time and involves risk. In the process of design, it is necessary to reconcile the objectives of those who commission buildings, often for their private use, with the objectives and interests of the wider public community. The achievement of good building is not easy and requires the creative collaboration of many disciplines and players. All those who work in agencies and organisations, or are engaged in activities or policies, that have, however indirectly, an influence over the procurement of buildings share a responsibility for the quality of the

buildings and the architecture we create. If architecture is to succeed, it needs sympathetic patronage, in the sense not only of a particular commissioning client, but of a society that has confidence in, and enthusiasm for, what architecture can achieve.

In the development of policy, we need to consider both the promotion and the implementation of policy objectives. We must continue to advocate the benefits of well-designed buildings, encourage debate and seek to ensure greater community participation in development matters. We also need to work to implement change and put in place conditions that will make a difference on the ground and help to deliver better buildings.

A major promotional aspect of policy has already been put in place. Last month, I announced the award of a grant of £300,000 per year over the next three years to the Lighthouse, which is Scotland's centre for architecture, design and the city. The grant will support a national programme of activities by the Lighthouse that is consistent with the aims of the policy. The programme of activities that is being developed will include the development of an online virtual architecture centre to deliver information on architecture and the built environment on a national basis; a programme of exhibitions that will tour Scotland; a programme of seminars, debates and other events aimed at encouraging community participation across Scotland in built-environment matters; and a partnership fund offering small grants to local communities that wish to develop their own projects, events, publications or exhibitions.

One of the key strengths of the Lighthouse is its educational programme and we are looking to develop other promotional initiatives in the educational field. We believe that the opportunity to develop an understanding of architecture and the built environment should be part of the social and cultural education of all our young people and that such an understanding has a part to play in realising our aims for social participation and inclusion. Architecture and the built environment are rich subject areas and can be used not only to illuminate and inform a range of curriculum subjects, but to support a set of broader educational objectives. I intend to make further announcements on the promotional aspects of policy objectives later in the year.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Allan Wilson: I am winding down.

Dennis Canavan: Winding up.

Allan Wilson: I am winding down towards winding up.

In the short term, some initiatives are coming to fruition. The forthcoming works procurement guidance that will be disseminated to clients for building projects in the Executive will contain advice on the role of good design in achieving value for money. We are also working closely with the planning policy area and collaborating on policy initiatives to raise the profile of urban and rural design and on the production of guidance material. Lewis Macdonald, who will close the debate, will say more about the initiative. In the coming months, I intend to make further announcements on the detail of our plans and on the commitments we have agreed to implement policy objectives.

I reiterate why we believe that architecture and the built environment are of fundamental concern. Buildings and the built environments that they shape touch almost every aspect of our lives and, as a consequence, have a profound effect on individuals and communities. Buildings are instrumental in realising our social objectives for a fair, democratic and inclusive society. They are a tangible manifestation of our culture. They tell the story of our past and carry into the future a message of our present values and aspirations.

We believe that architecture is too important to be marginalised as a matter for debate and policy. If we are to meet our social, cultural, environmental and economic objectives and confirm Scotland’s status as a decent place to live and work and a worthwhile place to visit, we need to have greater regard for the quality of our architecture and of our built environments.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges the social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits that good architecture and a well designed built environment can bring to Scotland and further acknowledges the benefits of a national policy on architecture.

The Presiding Officer: Before I call the next speaker, I advise members that the time limit for back-bench speeches will be six minutes. That time limit also applies to the winding-up speeches from Conservative and Liberal Democrat members. Mr Russell, you have more than six minutes.

14:55

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am sure that the length of speeches will add to the quality of the debate.

We heard the most extraordinary introduction to the debate from the minister—we listened for almost 20 minutes. I wrote down six lines from his speech, which I would like to share with the chamber. He said that buildings are

"interventions in the natural world"—

much like flying saucers—and that they carry a message "into the future". He also said that the purpose of the Government's policy is to work to implement change and that architecture is a rich subject area that can "illuminate and inform". Out of all that—and out of all the months of thinking and consultation documents—the Executive has produced a works procurement guide for civil servants. That is the fruit of the Executive's policy.

The minister gave us a wonderful dissertation.

Allan Wilson *rose*—

Michael Russell: I will get going first, but I will give the minister plenty of opportunity to interrupt me soon.

As I said, the minister gave us a wonderful advanced higher essay on the purposes of architecture, but it contained no policy at all. I defy him to give me an example of policy. The only thing that I learned from his speech was that the Lighthouse exists to promote the policy, but as there is no policy, I do not know what the Lighthouse will be doing—I presume that it will have to go out.

We should have known from the motion what we were in for.

Allan Wilson *rose*—

Michael Russell: I will give way in a moment.

The SNP did not lodge an amendment to the motion for one reason: to call the motion anodyne would be greatly to exaggerate its controversy. I am about to reveal to the minister far more policy than was contained in his speech, which surprises me. I thought that he might have had some policy, given the back-up that he had from civil servants and from that self-confessed expert on architecture, Des McNulty—who is sitting behind the minister and who will, no doubt, deliver a learned dissertation later.

When Rhona Brankin was the Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport, a framework document was published. I will come on to the result of the consultation, but the minister has lodged a motion for debate that will take up two and a half hours of parliamentary time in order to welcome the fact that he should have a policy. I always live in hope—I thought that, in a little coup de théâtre, the minister would announce that policy. However, he has announced nothing more than the fact that the Lighthouse exists to promote a policy that the minister does not have.

The minister's performance was astonishing, but one should not be surprised about that. The truth of the problem with the Executive's policy on architecture can be found in "The Development of a Policy on Architecture in Scotland: Report on the Public Consultation". Four hundred and thirteen people attended nine public meetings in Scotland. Those who attended are listed in the response document under what they do. They included architects, design professionals and others. There is also a listing for individuals—the people we want to be involved in debating and discussing architecture and the built environment—but how many individuals attended those meetings out of the total of 413? The answer is that only 10 members of the public attended nine public meetings.

Allan Wilson *rose*—

Michael Russell: I will take an intervention from the minister in a second—I want to finish my point. When I have done so, I will be happy for him to intervene.

Before the minister tells me, eight of those 10 individuals attended the meeting in Melrose. As Ian Jenkins knows, there is not much to do in Melrose of an evening—no doubt the meeting was a big draw. However, only 10 individuals attended those meetings and the issue at the core of our debate is why we have not engaged the people in Scotland in the debate on what architecture is about.

Allan Wilson: I would accept Mike Russell's criticism as relevant if the nationalists were able to quote to me the contribution that they made to the consultation document. Perhaps he could explain why, if he is so critical about the documentation and the lack of a policy proposal, he has not lodged an amendment to the motion?

Michael Russell: I have already explained to the minister why we did not seek to amend the motion. One would really have to be expert at splitting hairs in order to be able to amend the motion, and we are not—we are generous people. I am happy to contribute to the policy on architecture—I am just about to do so.

The question for the people of Scotland is, "What is architecture for?"

Allan Wilson *rose*—

Michael Russell: I see that the minister is being prompted by Rhona Brankin. Please carry on, minister. Let us hear Rhona Brankin's intervention.

Allan Wilson: I want to ask another question, wholly unprompted. What contribution did the nationalists make to the consultation?

Michael Russell: Fortunately, we are here to rescue the Executive from itself. In the course of the next 10 minutes, I shall give the minister plenty of ideas—gracious me, he needs them, given his speech.

I was speaking about the nine meetings, the 413 people and 10 members of the public. That

signifies that the people of Scotland are not engaged with the idea of building an architecture policy. There can be little surprise about that because the biggest public example of where architecture has gone wrong in Scotland is the responsibility of Parliament and the Scottish Executive—the Holyrood building. There can be no surprise that the idea of creating new buildings in Scotland has come under scrutiny and been found wanting. Indeed, the record of Governments in helping people through architecture is not good. I remember well a Tory Prime Minister—Harold Macmillan—who was MP for the place where I was born. In the 1950s, he had a plan to build 400,000 houses a year. In Scotland, 40,000 houses a year were built. Nowadays in Scotland, I doubt whether 1,000 public sector houses would be built in a year.

Fine buildings were created in the past, but we have great difficulty in pointing out fine buildings that are being built now. Sister Gallagher referred during time for reflection to the building that houses Parliament and its history. Part of its history is the building's function. It was created to be the Free Church of Scotland hall and to be an inspiration for a whole movement that was created in Scotland.

As the minister said, buildings are not just practical and they are not just utilitarian; they are sociological and cultural. We want to express our culture through our architecture, but therein lies the Executive's difficulty. For the Executive, the culture of Scotland is a culture that dare not speak its name. To develop a vernacular Scottish architecture that speaks to people is difficult for the Executive. There is endless consultation, but there are no results. That is the charitable interpretation of the appalling hollowness of what we heard from the minister.

We should start at the very lowest level and ask ourselves what specific problems we have to address in Scotland, and what are the specific components of those problems. One of the problems is architects. Architecture belongs far too much to architects. In the list of people who attended the public meetings, more than half were architects or from architectural professions. Architecture has become something for specialists, not for the population.

People have lived through two generations in which they have seen much of the environment with which they were familiar changed or destroyed. Some of the measures that Governments have taken have made the situation worse. The imposition of VAT on work to existing buildings, for example, has been an incentive to demolish rather than to conserve and improve. Planning has focused on economic issues and not on holistic issues—it has not focused on aesthetic, cultural, social, and people criteria and it has not focused on sustainable criteria for developing new buildings.

In addition, when regeneration is considered, sustainable best practice in conservation has never been given the same consideration as new build. We heard a graphic example of that in Parliament last week. Richard Simpson talked about the Holyrood project and attacked the Executive in respect of Queensberry House. He described the fact that Historic Scotland had insisted on limewashing that building as a disgrace. Does he not know that limewash and lime building were essential to the buildings of that time? Does he not know that there is a centre in Fife that was established by the family of the Earl of Elgin to teach architects, builders and practitioners how to use lime in restoration? We heard an attack upon an existing building because it got in the way. When politicians say such things, it turns off the public.

We also need to learn how to spend money to make a difference in comparatively small areas. For example, £9.8 million of grant aid was available to Historic Scotland in 1990 for the preservation of historic buildings—in particular, private historic buildings—but the figure is now only £11 million. The number of buildings that require assessment has grown enormously, but the amount of money has stayed almost the same.

There is an interesting example of new build in the Western Isles—the minister looks puzzled; perhaps he has just read his summing up—but the money that is available in grant and loan for croft houses has remained at £35,000 throughout the 1990s. That means that those who are trying to make a difference find doing so difficult. For example, the building of new black houses has become a very interesting movement. Werner Kissling's ideas of the 1930s have been built on by young architects to provide a cost-effective intervention in the Western Isles landscape that is sympathetic to that landscape. However, it is almost impossible to achieve that with the money that is available in grant and loan for croft houses.

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I thank Mike Russell for giving way. Does he agree that, in parallel with what he is saying, the present limit of improvement grant of £9,600 has been static for far too long?

Michael Russell: I am delighted to agree with Jamie Stone. As he is a member of the Executive parties, no doubt he need only write a letter to the minister and the level of grant will be raised.

The reality is that the low level of moneys that are available for the significant things—for allowing people to live in the landscape in which they need to live and for creating new build that is

sympathetic to the landscape—has squeezed out the best ideas. If I may quote Alastair Campbell, the "bog-standard" has been allowed to become the standard for building. We need to make some differences. We need an approach to architecture that encourages debate at the grass roots and in places where there is a physical problem in which Government policy can intervene.

We heard from the minister a long, 20-minute lecture on the theory of building that said absolutely nothing. I am sympathetic to the Lighthouse. It is a great thing, but how can it promote a policy that does not exist?

Sorry, is Rhona Brankin attempting to intervene?

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin): Yes, I am attempting to intervene. I am sorry to break up the rather negative diatribe that is so characteristic of Mr Russell. Can we be assured that in the SNP's manifesto—which, I believe, will emanate tomorrow—we will have a rather fuller exploration of his party's views on architecture? I look forward to that.

Will he inform us of the quality of the contribution that his party made to the development of the policy on architecture? I am sure that members would be interested to hear about that.

Michael Russell: I was used to the testy nature of Rhona Brankin's interventions when she was Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport. The nature of the intervention has not changed and neither has the content.

The reality is that we are debating Mr Wilson's motion, which is meant to be Labour policy. However, there is no policy. Rhona Brankin should not attack me because Labour does not have a policy—she should attack her colleagues. We are quite used to Labour's nonsensical approach. We need action, not words. I rise to attack Labour for its motion because the document that was published contained nothing and no announcement has been made today about what action will be taken on the key points that are contained in the consultation response; there has been no announcement of action. We have heard that the policy will be promoted by means of an exhibition—who knows what will be in it; blank walls, I presume—and by the publication of works procurement guidance for civil servants.

If the Labour party is not up to the job and cannot do it, I fully understand why; Labour has not been up to very much, so I can understand why it is not up to this.

The Deputy Minister for Transport and Planning (Lewis Macdonald): Will the member give way?

Michael Russell: No, I am concluding. We will have a chance to listen to Lewis Macdonald later—unfortunately.

If the Executive is going to produce a policy on architecture, it should bring it forward for debate. However, if the Executive wants simply to fill an afternoon with empty motions and emptier speeches, it is wasting the time of members, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish people—just as it has been doing for the past two years.

15:08

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): I cannot go along with Mike Russell's criticisms of the minister, because they were most unfair. When I read that we were to have today's debate, I wondered what a man of Allan Wilson's deep cultural skills and attachments would have to offer. Instead of a lecture on fenestration in the new town by a man of whom it is said that he does not know a flying buttress from a Flying Fortress, we heard an erudite speech. Allan Wilson did not do any particular good in respect of policy creation, but I am sure that when the minister sums up—whichever minister that happens to be—he or she will tell us that the policy will evolve.

We welcome today's debate and the opportunity to discuss the wide issue of architecture and the way in which it impinges on the lives of Scotland's citizens. We should learn the lessons of the past. In Scotland, we have had the best of architecture as well as the worst.

Is not it ironic that a country whose rich architectural heritage includes the tremendous contributions of architects such as Playfair, Craig, Alexander Thomson, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Robert Adam should also be the country that has produced Easterhouse and Pilton? Within Scotland, we see the extremes of imaginative, solid and individualistic architecture on one side and, on the other, the utilitarian, unimaginative and dysfunctional efforts of the 1960s.

When considering an issue such as this, it is necessary to consider the failures along with the successes. The inescapable conclusion is that Government-led initiatives on housing and architecture are seldom a success. It is not that the efforts that are made are in any way insincere; it is more that we owe our heritage to outstanding individuals such as those whom I mentioned. Even contemporary architecture has succeeded as a result of individual genius, rather than as a result of a collective and monitored approach. We have to view any form of national policy on architecture with a mixture of concern and, indeed, foreboding.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Bill Aitken commented on some of the problems—which also exist in other parts of Glasgow—that we have had in Easterhouse. Are those problems

due not to a lack of genius, but to a lack of common sense? The one thing that we should do when building houses is talk to the people who will live in them. Ask a woman what kind of house she wants and she will certainly come up with better ideas than others came up with in the past. We do not need individual geniuses; we need policy that puts people at the heart of decision making. That would make a bigger difference.

Bill Aitken: I find much to commend in that intervention. Of course it is largely a question of common sense. Indeed, at the moment, there is a commonsense revolution reverberating round the country. Johann Lamont made a sound point and with imagination and some practicality, we can achieve success. Manifestly, we have not achieved success in Scotland's peripheral housing schemes.

I have read some of the responses to the Executive's proposals and found them very interesting. The responses include recognition of the importance of the built environment to society and, in particular, of the relationship of architecture to public policy objectives. Many people who responded made it clear that they believed that "The Development of a Policy on Architecture for Scotland" would mark a significant step towards acknowledging the contribution of architecture to the cultural, economic and social life of Scotland. Many respondents also noted that the benefits of good architecture are not often recognised or valued in their time. Of course, Thomson and Charles Rennie Mackintosh could testify to that. Although many respondents accepted the aspirational tone of the framework document, many others felt that it was lacking in the guidance that is necessary to make progress along this particular route. The proposals are felt to be vague and unco-ordinated, and I felt that there was some vagueness about Allan Wilson's opening speech.

The fact that architecture cuts across a range of policy areas is of particular concern, and those policy areas cover Scottish Executive and Westminster responsibilities. One obvious thing that comes to mind is the differing VAT environment that applies to new build from that which applies to changes to existing buildings. I suggest that there would be advantage in examining that. We should avoid new build where possible and base our future architectural success on the good results of the past.

Allan Wilson: I accept that point—it is an integral part of the strategies and policies that are being developed. Does Bill Aitken accept that, because of events elsewhere, there are currently restrictions on the Executive making policy announcements and pronouncements?

Bill Aitken: I accept that there is an inhibition, but I look forward to the time when that inhibition has been removed and a Conservative Government will be able to address the problems that I am highlighting.

The Executive has possibly attempted to avoid being over-prescriptive in a number of the issues that it has raised. However, I am disappointed that nowhere has there been any effort to define what is good architecture and what is bad architecture. I see that Lewis Macdonald would like to intervene and suggest to me that such things are subjective. I accept that entirely, but it might have been useful to have some guidelines in the consultation document.

Those of us who come from Glasgow, and who see the architectural disasters of the 1960s and must live with them, know that the quality of the built environment is a vital component in an inclusive society. Where there is bad housing and where housing schemes are constructed without any thought not only about aesthetic appeal but—as Johann Lamont said—about practicalities, there will inevitably be social problems to accompany such situations. Where a dearth of architectural quality has been prevalent, we see environments that are simultaneously depressing and inevitable catalysts for social problems and unrest. Against that background, it is essential to recognise—as most members do—that good architecture can foster civic pride. That should be encouraged.

Another aspect of the consultation document that was of particular interest was a number of respondents' expressions of hope that the implementation of a policy on architecture would encourage clients, particularly those in the private sector, to take upon themselves a more socially responsible approach to commissioning practice. We in the Conservative party go along with that. Many respondents felt also that the public sector has an obligation to lead in commissioning high-quality architecture. That is down not only to the Executive, but to local authorities. Few local authorities in Scotland in recent times could hold up their hands and say in all honesty that they have been successful in that direction.

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I am listening with interest to what Bill Aitken is saying, because he is obviously attacking the "chuck 'em up" attitude of the 1960s. Does he believe that the planning regulations of local authorities and the Executive should include the recommendations of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 on energy conservation and heating?

Bill Aitken: There was an interesting debate—in fact, there has been a lengthy series of debates—at the Social Justice Committee on the Housing (Scotland) Bill. I refer Margaret Ewing to the *Official Reports* of those meetings, in which she will read the lengthy statements that I made on that subject, which will deal fully with her

intervention.

For many people, the touchstone of the issue is housing policy, because the quality of society's housing is a benchmark for the success or failure of architectural policy. Concern has been expressed about the impact on cities, towns and rural communities of the recent growth of car-dependent private housing developments. It has been suggested that such developments lack the characteristics that are necessary to promote coherent communities. That is another aspect to which architects must contribute.

I commend to the minister a thought on planning. We are not focusing planning on inner cities to the extent that we should. In Glasgow, for example, the area from the east of the High Street towards Parkhead remains blighted. Many people would live in that area if the planning regulations encouraged them to do so. That must be examined. There are advantages—isolated though they are in the east end—to living in an area that has a local community and easy access to the town centre. That should also be examined.

Scotland faces a challenging time on the architectural front, but it is a challenge that we must accept. We must look to successes elsewhere, particularly in Scandinavian cities, where many lessons have been learned. The Netherlands is another useful model of good practice. The value of architecture as a cultural phenomenon should not be underestimated. Those countries have recognised that fact and built on it to create better cities and environments and to facilitate the establishment of self-confidence in those cities.

The Conservatives have not lodged an amendment to the motion. As the minister would cheerfully admit, the motion is anodyne, but perhaps there will be some food for thought in the debate.

15:20

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I apologise for having left the chamber for a few minutes. If I repeat some points that have been made, I hope that members will forgive me.

Like other speakers, I am glad to welcome the debate. I was at first worried that I should not speak in the debate because I do not know enough about architecture. I may not be the only one. However, I decided on reflection that that was not a good excuse, because architecture affects all our lives, and I am the man in the street who looks round at the buildings and lives in the built environment to which the motion refers. My view is as valid as anyone else's. It is not more important, but it is at least as good.

Recently, I was in the company of a well-known Scottish architect, who was pleased that the debate was to take place. He believed that this could be the first time that architecture in its own right had been the topic of a parliamentary debate in the UK and certainly in this Parliament. That suggests that the climate is changing in our approach to architecture and the built environment.

That change began with the publication of "The Development of a Policy on Architecture for Scotland", which was mentioned in the partnership agreement. To Liberal Democrats, the document on architecture was a significant and encouraging document that firmly asserted the social, cultural, environmental and economic value and benefits of good architecture, as Allan Wilson said. As was also said, the publication was followed by a country-wide consultation, and the resulting document took us to a discussion of the issues and the respondents' views. Many respondents were architects or groups that are directly involved in the sphere. Broadly speaking, the public did not become as involved as we might have wished.

Michael Russell: The member referred to the consultation document and its response. He may have missed the end of Mr Wilson's lecture. The document that was referred to contains many key points, and I tried to press Mr Wilson on the policy. Will Ian Jenkins answer a policy question? For example, is the policy that arises from the consultation that the

"selection of consultants should be made on quality criteria and not solely on fee bids"?

Is that the Executive's policy, or is the document simply consultative? Have no decisions been made on such important issues?

Ian Jenkins: My understanding is that the document is interim and that the policy will be produced in a week or two.

Despite the fact that the public were not as involved as we might have hoped, the responses to the consultation document give us substantial food for thought. The debate confirms that the Parliament will not and should not allow the subject to move off the agenda. It is far too important for that.

Buildings of all sorts, past and present, surround us and help to define who we are and how we live. As the consultation document said:

"There is a fundamental inter-dependence between buildings and the lives of people … So fundamental are buildings to our lives that we often take them for granted and regard them as simply the given backdrop to our day to day existence … A nation and its culture are largely defined in the imagination of others by its towns and cities and landscapes … architecture has a deeper cultural value.

Architecture both shapes and is shaped by the society and place in which it is made."

Yesterday, I was standing at the crossroads of George IV Bridge and the High Street. From there, I could see social history in the architecture of a wonderful range of buildings, from the fortress of the castle, to the houses of Ramsay Gardens, St Giles cathedral, the Bank of Scotland building that signals the financial centre that Scotland is and the Museum of Scotland, in the opposite direction to the bank. As I turned, I looked down past St Giles to John Knox's house. I could have passed the Scottish Poetry Library—a nice wee example of architecture making developments—and gone towards Our Dynamic Earth and, of course, Holyrood palace and the new Parliament building. As I stood there at the crossroads, it was possible to see the way we were, the way we are and the way that we are to be.

Bruce Crawford: Did Ian Jenkins manage to see all those buildings when he was on one of Lothian Regional Transport's open-topped bus tours?

Ian Jenkins: I have always promised myself that I would use public transport, but that is one form of public transport that I have not used for a long time.

In the course of my lifetime, however, modern architecture by and large has had a bad press. Mistakes have been made and there have been times when it has appeared that architects designed buildings for themselves and their users but forgot that the exterior aspects of their buildings are public places. I recall an old piece of doggerel that said:

"My face I don't mind it, because I'm behind it
It's the folk out in front that I jar."

I think, for example, of new school buildings that I know in which the design and architecture have ensured that the teaching and learning environment has been hugely improved for those inside the building, but it seems that little or no consideration has been given to the visual or environmental impact on the neighbours.

In those situations, a sense of social responsibility has been lost, perhaps because of a lack of funds or a simple lack of consideration. Of course, buildings last and ill-designed buildings last almost as long as good ones. All funding mechanisms must be examined when we are dealing with public buildings to ensure that we allow social responsibility to the wider public to be taken into account. Frank Lloyd Wright is reputed to have said:

"The physician can bury his mistakes, but the architect can only advise his client to plant vines".

However, it seems to me that, more than ever, we are coming to recognise that good modern architecture can be life-enhancing and an agent for regeneration and inspiration.

The heart of Dundee, for example, has been reinvigorated by the construction of the Overgate Centre and the Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre, together with interesting street sculpture. Those developments have drawn people in. They have enhanced the experience of the increasing numbers who go to Dundee for shopping, entertainment and culture. They are an economic plus and a tourism plus. In every way, good architecture can draw success to itself.

I believe that the public are becoming ready to accept innovative design and to welcome it into their lives. I always like shopping malls and similar places. Some of the best-designed ones have introduced people to really good modern architecture and design in a way that might not have happened previously. That is to our benefit in the long run.

I look forward to the minister's policy document, which is promised shortly. I would like to touch briefly on a number of topics that I hope will be addressed in that policy.

Housing has been mentioned clearly. I came in and heard Bill Aitken speaking about housing in Glasgow. Housing, to me, ought to have a sense of place. I get upset when, in my area, we have housing developments in which the house types have names such as Ascot, Richmond or Winchester. Developers go and buy the Winchester model and set it up in Peebles. They just throw the houses up—they are perfectly good, but they are not sympathetic, they are not local, they do not in any way relate to the local environment and do not even pretend to. Perhaps that is more honest.

We must also ensure that housing has a sense of scale. Houses should not just be houses but should feel like home. Sometimes architecture has not taken the leap into that issue.

Mr Tosh: I am familiar with some of the housing developments in his constituency that Mr Jenkins mentioned. Obviously, he is unhappy with suburban developments appearing in rural areas. Does he think that that is related to our planning policies? Do we need to reconsider, for example, the way that we operate green belts? At the moment, we seem to be exporting Edinburgh's population to Fife, the Lothians and the Borders.

Ian Jenkins: To jump to giving up or reassessing green belts would be a big jump—reassessment I would not mind. The planning guidelines need to be examined for reasons that I will come on to later if I have time.

I commend the work of housing associations—I

think that Murray Tosh did so earlier—which seem to be doing some of the best vernacular architecture of the present. There are examples in Glasgow that were mentioned to me by Sebastian Tombs from the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Sustainability is another matter. The environmental and social impact of new buildings should always be taken into account, as well as the number of cars, the number of children, the infrastructure of the area and the number of bus services that will be necessary. We should consider sustainability in terms of the reuse and enhancement of older buildings. A fine example is an old church in Peebles that is being remodelled by Richard Murphy Architects to become an arts centre. It will be a wonderful facility for the town. We should consider environmentally sustainable materials and insulation and there should be a policy in the document on promoting and encouraging solar heating in its various guises.

Murray Tosh mentioned the planning system. I have a strong urge to ensure that the system be amended to allow people to feel that they have a better chance of influencing decisions. I know that there are consultation methods, but people repeatedly feel disfranchised and unable to make changes and influence the way in which development works. The planning system is deeply frustrating and allows the construction of buildings that everyone in the community believes to be the wrong type for the area. Houses that are built where an expansion in the housing stock is desired will certainly sell, but at a cost to the heart of the communities to which they are added.

I should say something about education, because there is a section in the consultation document about architectural training. Such training is important and there ought to be a move to train more students in the current requirements of good design. To be honest, though, it is not about the number of students so much as the quality of the training and the encouragement that students receive through competitions and prizes. Central and local government ought to be commissioners of the best kind of architecture that we can afford. That ought to be part of the way we think.

I look forward to the strategy. It has been said that, of all the arts, architecture is the one that acts most slowly but most surely on the soul. If we can improve Scottish architecture, we can improve the soul of our country.

15:33

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): I declare my interest as convener of the cross-party group on architecture in the built environment and as chair of the 1999 festival of architecture and design in Glasgow. That does not in any sense make me an expert on architecture, whatever Mike Russell says.

I am interested in architecture. It is a fit subject for politicians to take an interest in, not only in terms of the general issue of buildings, but because it gives an important dimension to policies. Architecture can have a profound impact on how well we deliver policies in areas such as housing, education and health. For that reason I am delighted that the Executive has produced the document on architecture. I am concerned to ensure that the policy that emerges has an impact across the range of Executive policies.

The Government will build more hospitals, schools and homes and refurbish more homes than any other Government at any time in our history. I do not want to keep harking back to the 18 years of Conservative rule, but I was in Strathclyde at a time when the education authority for half of Scotland was building barely one new primary school a year. At that replacement rate, the average life expectancy of a school was 400 years.

We now have a situation in Glasgow where every secondary school is undergoing a major refurbishment, and a significant number of new schools are being built. That process, which has had an important architectural and design input, has the potential to fundamentally transform the quality of educational delivery in Glasgow. As an interested parent whose children go to Glasgow secondary schools, I and thousands of other parents expect to benefit from that.

I will not say that I was disappointed with Mike Russell's contribution. It was his normal, knockabout, rather pompous contribution, and one that was marked by superficial cynicism. It did what Mike always does, which is to drive down what is being done here in Scotland. It seems that the SNP members cannot make a speech on a subject where they are denied their two theme songs: the iniquity of the Barnett formula and what independence will deliver in any dimension.

At the end of the day, Mike Russell was left with nothing to say, apart from abuse, insults and cynicism. He made a point about how few people are involved in the consultation process. In Glasgow in 1999, nearly a million people visited the exhibition programme, in which a whole range of different exhibitions was offered. That was an indication of people's real interest in architecture and design. It also did a number of additional things for Glasgow. It promoted the quality of Glasgow's architecture, including the great work of Alexander Thomson and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. It was a huge boost for the tourist industry. Whatever Mike Russell may think, people

are actually interested in architecture. They are interested in the aesthetics of architecture and in what architecture can do to change their lives.

There was a partnership fund, which created more than 100 local projects. People in their communities and local groups partnered architects and designers to deliver something that they actually wanted. In the course of the year, we had festivals in each quarter of the city, which were well attended. There were innovative millennium spaces projects, which created new urban spaces in deprived areas of Glasgow, each of which contributed something to social inclusion and the quality of life in those areas. We created homes for the future—an innovative scheme that drew together planners, architects and builders to provide an architecturally rich development that works economically, environmentally, aesthetically and socially.

Michael Russell: Will Des McNulty give way?

Des McNulty: I shall take an intervention later.

Architecture is too important to be left to the architects. That is one point on which I absolutely agree with Mike Russell. My experience of 1999 and of the work that I have been doing with architects is that architects are being drawn into a dialogue with end users.

Bill Aitken talked about the poor architecture and lack of architectural input into some of the developments that took place in the past.

Michael Russell: Will Des McNulty give way?

Des McNulty: I would like to finish this point.

It is true that, in the 1950s and 1960s, deserts with windows were created, because not enough thought was put into what we were building. We should compare that with what is being done at Graham Square in Glasgow, where a new environment is being created in which local residents and members of housing associations have had a substantial input into all dimensions of the design process. They were not just asked what kind of taps they would like; they were asked about how they would like the whole framework of their environment to be put together.

We want to avoid the kind of patronising attitudes that Mike Russell demonstrates. Architects in the past had those kinds of patronising attitudes. Architects now and in the future are getting away from that. Mike gave a very good illustration of what was wrong.

Michael Russell: Had the minister mentioned any of the initiatives that Des McNulty has mentioned, had the minister produced a policy proposal to support such initiatives or had the motion mentioned the good work that has been done in Glasgow, I would have been entirely happy to praise those initiatives. I do so now.

We are debating a motion from the minister that says there should be a national policy. We do not have that policy and, by the admission of Ian Jenkins, a member of the Liberal party, which is part of this Executive, we are not getting the policy for another few weeks. This is a waste of our time. There is not a national policy.

I say to Mr McNulty that I am not criticising those initiatives. I am criticising the minister for what he is doing here today.

Des McNulty: In this debate, we are meant to make a positive contribution on architecture. [*Interruption.*] Let me say to Mike Russell that we have a warm deal policy to deal with poor heating. We should consider examples such as Graham Square. Relatively recently, I went to a new architectural development in the Gorgie area of Edinburgh that was designed to take into account the environment and the use of heating. Heating bills in that development are probably about a quarter of what they are in older styles of architecture.

Consider the way that the new designs can deal with the threat of crime. If people are involved in the process of creating social environments—

Bruce Crawford: Will Des McNulty give way?

Des McNulty: Sorry. I must wind up.

Probably the most interesting event of 1999 was a conference that we held towards the end of the year, which examined architecture for people with dementia. There cannot be a more vulnerable group of people in our society than those who suffer from dementia. People from around the world talked about projects and developments in public settings such as hospitals that showed how a little forethought and not very much added expense could make people's lives so much better. That is why architecture is important. That is why Mr Russell has bombed again.

15:42

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I would love to speak about the benefits of independence for Scotland, but I will stick to the brief.

The minister's motion

"acknowledges the social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits that good architecture … can bring".

The most important point in the motion is the social benefits that architecture brings. Often, when we discuss architecture—and in the Executive document itself—it all becomes a bit high flown and we get away from the real benefits that architecture can bring. I am not especially criticising that, because it is a fault throughout

society that when issues such as architecture are mentioned, people say, "Oh, I don't really want to know about that." It then becomes a discussion for those and such as those.

One of the observations of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland was that

"The architecture policy consultation did not capture the imagination of the public".

That is a fact. Mike Russell talked about the number of members of the public that turned up at meetings. That is noted throughout the consultation. We must address the issue, because architecture captures the imagination of the public, but only certain aspects of architecture. We must examine that and learn from it.

It has been mentioned that although there have been a lot of disasters in housing, a lot of good work has also been done. I contend that most of the good stuff that has been done in housing is where it has captured the imagination of the public and there has been direct public input into the finished product. Housing associations are in the front line in the promotion of that. I have seen it in action.

Architecture can capture the imagination of the public, if they are truly participating in creating the end product. We should promote that—it is stressed throughout the document. Page 6 states:

"Because the purpose of architecture is to serve and sustain human life, it has all the complexities of life."

That is wonderful; it does. The document also says:

"We should develop a better understanding of the needs of building users, of their perception of space and place and of the ergonomics of use."

My final quotation comes from page 44, where it says:

"The essential and irreducible purpose of building is to meet human needs".

Absolutely.

However, something still bothered me. I asked one of the researchers to find out where the document mentions accessibility, because one of the issues about architecture that we must address is accessibility for everyone in our society, including the disabled. The researcher told me that accessibility is mentioned only on page 35. Sure enough, the word "accessible" is mentioned, but the document says only:

"We need to make the vocabulary, grammar and language of building design accessible to all."

That kind of talk does not make building design accessible to all. Instead of sending these glossy documents into the community, we should be offering people real choice and participation in architectural matters.

I have some serious concerns about architecture and the built environment in relation to the disabled. Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 comes into operation in 2004. As building regulations apply to any new building, rehabilitation or alterations, any buildings currently planned or under way are likely to meet the criteria outlined in the act. However, the act also impacts on existing premises and covers any property that provides a service. Broadly speaking, that includes public buildings such as shops and offices. It requires that reasonable adjustments are made to properties to make them accessible to the disabled.

At this point, I want to go off on a wee tangent about the definition of disability. Architects, planners and those involved in building have too often been guilty of talking about only mobility in relation to the disabled. However, many other forms of disability are directly affected by the accessibility of buildings and the environment, and we should widen our scope on this matter.

What worries me about the enactment of part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is that 2004 is not that far away and I have not seen much publicity about the need for premises to be adapted for disabled people. The Executive must start a publicity drive to make it very plain what people need to do to adapt their premises. I would be very interested to hear from the minister whether there are any plans to do so, because I hate the thought that 2004 will come around and nothing will have been done.

Before I go any further, I should pick up on the point about the amount of time that people spend in buildings. The Royal Institution of Architects in Scotland has estimated that people spend about 90 per cent of their time in buildings which, as Ian Jenkins pointed out, include not just houses but hospitals, schools and leisure facilities. Such public buildings will need to meet certain criteria.

I have recently received many representations in Lanarkshire that the new Hairmyres hospital building might not be disabled-friendly. As I am currently investigating that issue, I cannot make a judgment on it. However, I would like the minister's reassurance that the same stringent conditions that apply to publicly procured buildings such as the new Scottish Parliament—which will have a good level of accessibility—also apply to public buildings procured through public-private partnerships and similar private sector initiatives.

15:49

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Linda Fabiani mentioned the importance of consultation. I think that it was King Alfonso X of Castile who said that if he had been present at the

creation of the universe, he would have had some very useful hints to suggest to its creator.

It makes sense to make suggestions before something is created instead of after. The Administration issued its plans for a national policy on architecture for consultation and the responses supported many of its aspirations, such as the desire to support an awareness and enjoyment of architecture through the educational curriculum and to use the curriculum to develop creativity and self-expression.

There is also a wish to encourage greater involvement of local communities in matters affecting local buildings and the built environment. In that context, the Administration put forward the idea that architecture and the built environment should be properly integrated into international strategies for sustainable development and put the case for seeking ways in which to facilitate collaborative working among creative people and the inclusion of artists' and craftsmen's work in building design.

Although the aspirational tone of the document was welcomed, there were some criticisms. First, some people said that more emphasis should have been put on having buildings of quality. Secondly, some said that there was a lack of emphasis on the existing built heritage; many people felt that the quality of Scotland's architecture had been underplayed. Thirdly, it was felt essential to define what makes good architecture, as what constitutes excellence in design can often be a matter of subjective judgment.

If I had to give an example of Scotland's greatest listed building, I would mention the Forth rail bridge, which is still one of the wonders of the world and bears comparison with the Eiffel Tower and the Statue of Liberty. If I had to give a further example of a most impregnable and beautifully designed fortress, I would mention Fort George, which was so powerful that nobody ever dared to attack it. I mention those examples because they are magnets for tourism, which creates many jobs in Scotland. It follows that the work of Historic Scotland in conservation projects at Edinburgh Castle and Stirling Castle is invaluable. Those castles bring well over a million tourists to Edinburgh and several hundred thousand to Stirling. That work by Historic Scotland is essential and should continue.

Michael Russell: Would Lord James add to that list of memorable buildings one with which he will be familiar, which is also a tourist attraction and used to belong to the family Châteauhérault? Perhaps the lesson that it teaches is that one should not dig coal mines under buildings, as that tends to make them fall down. Would Lord James care to remind members of that as well?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes. There is a museum for the miners who worked under Châteauhérault, which draws many tourists and into which there is appropriate community input.

An example of a memorable building in Glasgow is Spiers Wharf. The old wharf buildings were converted into magnificent housing with the assistance of the council, the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland and other grant-giving bodies.

The housing association movement in Scotland is rightly seen as one of Scotland's foremost success stories. The houses around the clock tower in Ecclefechan and the modernised houses with a sculpture commemorating the industrial past at Whiteinch, in Glasgow, are examples of excellence in architecture. The Govanhill Housing Association should also be commended for its important work in plugging the ground underneath its development, which had been extensively mined. In such developments, it is important that proper access for the disabled is built into any modernisation plans and any new construction.

We must remember that the construction of great architecture in Scotland owes much to the brilliance, genius and ingenuity of great architects, such as James Craig, who built Edinburgh's new town—the Athens of the north—Charles Rennie Mackintosh, who designed the Glasgow School of Art, and Robert Adam, who designed some of the most famous buildings that stand proudly in our cities. Their inspiration did not derive from state control. Governments should encourage architecture with a light touch, using public funds as a catalyst to start major regeneration activity.

I end with a light-hearted but serious example. The Royal Museum of Scotland has recently opened a magnificent extension—a brilliant new design. I welcome the development—it is in Scotland's best interests—but when the original plans were made public, my late friend Sir Nicholas Fairbairn claimed that it would look like a Mexican jail. In reality, his fears were seriously misplaced and we have a building—mainly funded by the previous Government—of which we can rightly be proud.

I cite that example to show that architects should not be afraid of coming forward with enlightened proposals that take account of the needs of Scottish communities and which will promote Scotland as having high-quality accommodation, visitor attractions and other facilities and museums and galleries of which the nation can be proud.

Excellence in architecture can help to make Scotland one of the great international tourism destinations of the 21st century. To make that happen, we need to have the freedom and the independence of mind to create initiatives that build on consumer appeal. I appeal to the minister

not to be too prescriptive. Architects have to be free from excessive and extensive interference if they are to improve Scotland's architecture and housing and adhere to and develop the highest standards in good, modern design.

15:55

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): When I asked to speak in today's debate, I was unsurprised to learn that there was not a queue of MSPs who wanted to contribute. That suggests that members of the Parliament are just like the members of the public who did not attend the meetings that Mr Russell talked about. Unlike Mr Russell, I intend not to criticise the Executive for that but to welcome the Executive's commitment to allowing individuals to contribute. We have a way to go before the mechanisms that allow individuals in the community to participate in community planning are as robust as we would like them to be, but all that Mr Russell's speech did was exhibit his expertise—he did not stand for Scotland, as he and his party claim to do; he stood for himself and added little to the debate.

Bruce Crawford: Given Karen Whitefield's attack on my good friend, Mr Russell, would she be good enough to tell us which of the policy announcements we heard from the minister today she supports?

Karen Whitefield: Today we have heard the Executive talk about community planning and the need to ensure that architecture addresses our social justice aims and allows the public to have access to hospitals and public services.

Policy on architecture and the built environment can, at first glance, appear to be dry and unexciting but, as Allan Wilson pointed out, the design and construction of our homes, communities and public buildings are woven so deeply into our everyday life that we are often unaware of them until they begin to fail. The core objectives of reducing poverty and improving the health and well-being of all Scottish people require good-quality housing and well-serviced communities, which must be designed. Design must be responsive to the needs and aspirations of Scotland's communities. The delivery of warm, well-insulated and comfortable homes is dependent on good design.

It is important that we learn from some of the planning and design mistakes of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Good house design must be married with strong and efficient planning and building control systems, which must be responsive to local needs and concerns. They must ensure not only that our buildings are safe and well constructed but that they are energy-efficient. Fuel poverty damages too many Scottish families. The Housing (Scotland) Bill, stage 2 of which has just been completed, includes a range of measures, supported by the Executive, that will ensure that building control systems contribute to the battle to ensure that no one in Scotland has to live in a damp, cold house.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I agree with Karen Whitefield that no one should have to live in a cold, damp house. Does she agree that, during stage 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Bill yesterday, the Executive missed a chance to set minimum standards that would have achieved that aim?

Karen Whitefield: While I am aware of Ms Marwick's commitment to the issue, the fact is that the amendments in her name, which were disagreed to by the Social Justice Committee yesterday, would have done nothing to improve tolerable standard conditions in Scotland. The amendments were too vague to ensure that people do not have to live in cold, damp houses. People could have interpreted them in such a way that they would have made no difference.

I am pleased that the Scottish Executive has committed itself to publishing a policy on architecture.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Will Karen Whitefield give way?

Karen Whitefield: I would love to take Fiona Hyslop's intervention, but I must move on—I am sorry.

The creation of a policy on architecture is indicative of the importance of good building design, not only to the Scottish Executive, but to the Scottish people.

There is a further role for the Scottish Executive in promoting good design. As a significant commissioner of new buildings, the Scottish Executive can lead by example. In its procurement policy, it can ensure, as a client, that functionality and the aesthetic are seen as being as important as cost. That effort should be, and often is, mirrored by local authorities, which are also significant commissioners of new buildings across Scotland.

Scotland has a proud tradition of architecture that, to coin a phrase, is both progressive and pragmatic. From Mackintosh's Glasgow School of Art and School Street buildings to more modern projects such as the Museum of Scotland and the homes for the future development on Glasgow green, the best of Scottish architecture manages to combine the aesthetic and function. I am confident that the forthcoming architecture policy will be a valuable tool in continuing that tradition.

It is now common to talk about the cross-cutting nature of ministerial portfolios and subject areas.

That is as it should be. Architecture and planning are excellent examples of areas where there is a need to consider Scottish problems holistically. The design of a school or hospital can and does affect the services that we can offer; an efficiently designed house can play a large part in reducing fuel poverty and the fact that a community is well planned can prevent a range of social problems.

I look forward to the Scottish Executive publishing a policy for architecture that nurtures and encourages good design and highlights the importance of architecture to each and every person in Scotland.

16:02

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I declare two interests. First, I am a member of the cross-party group on architecture and the built environment; secondly, I am a long-term lay member of the Scottish Ecological Design Association.

Housing is one of the three main contributors to global warming, along with transport and industry. Two years ago, I stood in the chamber and made a speech about insulation and high environmental standards. One year ago, I stood in the chamber and, in my own parliamentary time, made a speech about how to achieve high environmental standards in housing. This week, I introduced the same idea I spoke about a year ago—which is one of the many ideas I introduced two years ago—by asking the Scottish Executive to require that any house, at the point of sale, have attached to it a Home Energy Conservation Act 1995—HECA—report or an estimate of the house's insulation quality. So far, I have got nowhere. I say to the Executive that it is a small thing, but one which could make a great difference.

I will illustrate why not requiring such reports is not making a difference. I recently visited two projects, one of which was the Link Housing Association project near Abbeyhill. It is thought that the project has achieved a projected 50 per cent reduction in energy use. Two weeks ago, I accompanied some friends of mine, who are buying a small flat, to a project off Leith Walk, built by one of the big firms—I will not cause embarrassment by mentioning its name. I asked the people there if they could give me a HECA report on the quality of insulation in the company's housing. All they could tell me was that nowhere in the documents was anything said about insulation; there was no HECA report. They could tell me only, "It's up to the minimum standards—and probably a bit better."

That is not good enough. The big housing firms that are currently building houses across Scotland must be shamed, pushed or regulated into building houses to the very highest standards of insulation. They must declare, when they sell the houses, what those standards are, so that people know how much it will cost to heat them for as long as they are there.

I take issue with Mike Russell, who said that architects have too much control over what is happening. I am more of the opinion of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton; we need a light touch. A national policy should release, not constrain, the skills and imagination of our architects. We must remember that most of our architects work in small firms, with one, two or three people pitching for work. All too often, they are constrained by financial and material considerations to the point that they cannot express their artistic imagination in what they end up designing. That is why we still have too much of the bland and of the late 20th century neoclassical brutal in our cities and countryside. Members should think about that and think of examples.

Mr Stone: Mike Russell. [*Laughter.*]

Robin Harper: To be serious, what we need from a national policy is support for the development of environmental design and for research and development in the production of sustainable and recycled materials. There is a dearth of recycled and sustainable materials. Many architects would like to use them, but far too often they have to import them from Europe.

I will give an example of the kind of joined-up thinking that we need. Link Housing Association uses Warmcel, which is made from recycled newspapers. We produce thousands of tonnes of newspapers that are not being recycled. We need to encourage industry to use recycled materials. We must also encourage environmental design. It is not worth saying that we encourage environmental design if we do not do other joined-up things, such as encourage the use of recycled materials.

City design was mentioned. We need an intensive discussion of what we believe in—something to underpin everything we do. Perhaps there should be a combination of the ideals of James Craig, Patrick Geddes and the modern architect and designer in the United States, Amory Lovins, who is a specialist in environmental sustainability for buildings—not, I stress, in the exterior design of buildings.

On environmental design, we need a revolution in sourcing materials, social architecture, national planning policy guidelines and how we discuss, plan and contract for changes in our cities. Do we have a grand design? Do we believe in dense cities? Do we believe in urban villages? Are we able to combine all those concepts with the idea of having essential green spaces, social spaces, streets and squares? We need socially benign

designs that are based on an overall return to the street and tenement, with shops and amenities within walking distance, but with opportunities for individuality of design and approach in schemes. Why should not our poor and poorest people live in a design context that is as people-friendly and beautiful as the new town of Edinburgh?

The final pebble I toss into the pond is to ask why should not our biggest contracts require at least two or three architects, so that we get diversity of design, instead of long, monotonous estates.

16:09

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I, too, declare an interest; I am a member of the cross-party group on architecture and the built environment. I should also declare—perhaps confess—that in my youth I considered becoming an architect. Indeed, I applied for an architecture course at one of Glasgow's universities, only to change my mind when it became apparent that all those years ago I would have little opportunity to consider buildings in relation to social inclusion—it was not called social inclusion then—or to think about how to design and build houses that people wanted to live in. Instead, I opted to spend four years at Glasgow School of Art, within the confines Charles Rennie Mackintosh's creation.

My early upbringing and interest in architecture left me with the clear view that, when we talk about creating a built environment, it is not good enough simply to throw up buildings or to do things in the cheapest way—we must have buildings that are fit for their purpose and in which people want to live. In fact, we should do a bit more than that.

Some people question why a hard-line socialist such as me takes an interest in grand buildings from the past. I always explain that the monument is not to the wealth that created the buildings; rather, it is to the vision of the people who designed them, the craftsmanship of the people who built them and the purpose for which they were designed. A number of members have referred to that aspect of the debate.

I have seen the worst of building and architecture. I once lived in a deck-access maisonette. Reference was made earlier to some great architects; Basil Spence may have got it right with Coventry cathedral, but he did not do too well in the Gorbals. Many people found that out when they had to live there.

I have also lived in a house into which it was impossible to get a pram without doing a variation on a three-point turn and tipping the baby out. Women had no say in where the front door was or how many steps there were—[*Interruption.*] Mr Kerr refers to the problems with a double buggy. I am afraid that his weans would have been taken into care if he had lived in the house I was talking about; he would not have got a double buggy through the door.

In the past couple of years, I have had the opportunity to see the imaginative ways in which some local authorities, health boards and other organisations in my area are working to put together new public buildings. I do not know whether those buildings will be up there, being described as great architecture in 100 years' time—other people will be the judge of that—but the new school in Auchinleck has been designed to meet the needs of children and young people. The school is on a scale for children and takes into account their safety and provides them with a decent environment. The new hospital in Cumnock takes into account many of the issues raised by Linda Fabiani—it has been designed to accommodate the needs of the people who will use it, such as those with dementia or mobility difficulties. A new area centre in Dalmellington is about to open in which people will be able to do everything from reporting crimes to the police to getting married—they will now be able to do all that under one roof. The centre used to be industrial units, but with a bit of imagination, vision and foresight, the local authority, the health board and others are putting together an imaginatively designed building that will bring people together.

It is important to remember the other types of buildings in which people spend a lot of time—the working environment. This debate is not just about homes for living in; we should also consider the health and safety aspects of buildings. For many years, so-called sick building syndrome created environments that were not safe, healthy or comfortable for people to work in.

I welcome this opportunity, which at least allows us to begin to raise the debate. I accept that we do not yet have a fully fledged policy, but we have never had an opportunity to discuss the development of a policy in such terms. Someone asked whether we should decide what is good architecture or whether that is the Executive's role. I will hazard a few comments about what is good architecture and what is not. Given some of the things that go on in the name of design, Charles Rennie Mackintosh would be birling in his grave to think that people seriously consider that the addition of four wee squares on front doors makes for good design. Each of his buildings was designed for the site in which it was located and with the tastes and ideas of the people who were going to use it in mind. They were designed also to make best use of the materials available and to try to create somewhere pleasant for people to be and where they would want to spend their time.

The Executive should produce a policy that takes those aspirations into account and ensures community involvement in the process. Only 10 people might turn up to a fairly academic debate on the future of architecture, but if a public meeting is held on a new school, hospital or community facility, people will turn up in their droves to say what they want in their communities and what is and is not good design. That is the way forward; it is about looking at the social context and at people's aspirations.

16:15

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I confess that I am not altogether persuaded that a Charles Rennie Mackintosh chair represents the best design for comfortable living.

The debate has been interesting, with some fine contributions, although it was marred at the beginning by members dancing on the head of a pin.

I am intrigued to see how my colleagues on the Social Justice Committee are celebrating the end of stage 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Bill. Most committee members and the Deputy Minister for Social Justice have been in the chamber. The singular and obvious exceptions are the SNP committee members. That is a significant point when we hear Mike Russell pontificating about what we should do about architecture.

Allan Wilson: Does the member agree that we would have taken Mike Russell's criticisms of the consultation process and the delay in the production of a policy a bit more seriously if he or any of his fellow nationalists had contributed to the consultation process in the first place?

Robert Brown: That is a valid point. In fairness, I accept that Mike Russell made a number of good points—he knows a fair bit about the subject. Nevertheless, those points would have been better made in a more positive fashion.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Robert Brown: No, I want to proceed, if Fiona Hyslop does not mind.

A more positive point is the link between housing and design, which a number of members have touched on. Bill Aitken rightly said that the quality of the built environment is fundamentally linked to notions of social inclusion. I want to contribute my tuppence worth on that.

I live about half a mile from Castlemilk, which was built in probably as good an environmental and scenic place as can be imagined—in the lea of the Cathkin braes. Everything possible went wrong in the development of the scheme, which was not all because of the scheme's facilities, although that was a factor. The problem was with the mix of families, family sizes and the number of children, and with the bad design of bin shelters and green area layouts. At the extreme, those factors caused many of the problems that such areas have faced.

By contrast, and as members have pointed out, there are a number of examples of good design involving housing associations. The Crown Street regeneration project in Glasgow is probably one of the best examples of urban design. It is near the city centre and it is well designed—attention is paid to the space around it. It is a successful project.

Projects in Partick and Meadowside have also been successful and attention has been paid to the design of the streetscapes around them. Those elements are important. In a slightly different context, the work of Glasgow Conservation Trust West in coming up with designs for the rehabilitation of railings, parks and buildings in the significant architectural area of the west end of Glasgow is worthy of mention.

Those projects contrast with the standard suburban designs that are churned out by volume housebuilders in many of the gap sites that have been developed in cities such as Glasgow and throughout the country—people might as well be in Crewe as in East Kilbride or in Milton Keynes as in Cambuslang. Whatever else they do, the designs do not reflect the social nature of the community in which they have been realised. Although many of the houses have good internal design arrangements, they are less successful at fitting into their environment.

Mr Tosh: Does not the market disprove what Mr Brown is saying? All the research shows that people want to live in such houses and enjoy that kind of suburban architecture and lifestyle. Is he saying that we should no longer permit developments in urban settings simply because they are made of facing brick rather than with traditional vernacular materials?

Robert Brown: No, I am not saying that at all. We need to be able in some way to match both objectives. Murray Tosh is right—I tried to touch on the issue he raises when I mentioned the houses' internal design and layout. Many such houses are popular. They sell well and are attractive to people, although, because of house prices, they are often the only option available.

Near my local area in Cambuslang, a new scheme of about 1,200 houses is being built, which will be called Drumsagard village. Drumsagard was the medieval name for Cambuslang. The 1,200 houses are in streets with names that range from Acacia Way, Alder Gate,

Ash Wynd, Aspen Place right through to Walnut Place. The streets go alphabetically round the village. Although I am not an expert on trees, I am not entirely convinced that all those trees are Scottish—some of the names certainly do not suggest it. It is not unreasonable to say that a little more imagination is required in aspects other than design.

Robin Harper rightly mentioned green space and construction materials, which, too, are relevant issues. Linda Fabiani raised the issue of disabled housing. Members may recall that I had a members' debate on that subject a little while back. The need to give appropriate training to architects was mentioned in that debate, as it was earlier this afternoon. That is a generational thing. It is extraordinarily difficult to get people to adapt their traditional practices, which they will have used for many years, so as to have a more modern appreciation of realities. In Drumsagard village, a number of houses have the usual two or three steps up to the front door. That may be nice, but it is not ideal for whole-life living. Attention must be paid to that kind of feature.

Apart from reinforcing what has already been said about planning, I want to make one final point about old buildings. As members of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body know, the Parliament has had considerable debate, within the context of Holyrood, about the future of Queensberry House. One issue was whether to restore the building to a notional past state that may or may not have existed and about which there is learned dispute. Sometimes we are a little too obsessed about precise historical analogies. I think that it was Ian Jenkins who said that houses are whole-life things. They move on through time, as it were; they are not static in one place in time.

Design and architecture include the idea of social responsibility to the wider public. We must always hold on to the nub of that idea. I support the motion.

16:22

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Scotland's new towns are not often mentioned in the same sentence as the words "architectural excellence". The maisonettes and flat-roof, back-to-front and upside-down houses are all testament to some of the worst examples of municipal architecture—at election time, canvassers and leafleters find a ball of string an essential campaign tool. However, the new towns also contain some architectural gems. For example, St Paul's Church in Glenrothes, which was designed by Gillespie, Kidd and Coia, has been hailed as a modern-day masterpiece and described as the most significant piece of modern church architecture north of the English channel. I urge members to visit it.

There is one area in which Scotland's new towns and Glenrothes in particular, led the way: public art. The beautiful and powerful Benno Schotz sculpture, "Ex Terra", was unveiled in 1967. It is a 23ft bronze of a mother and six children, which is designed to represent the growth of a town while recognising where Fife came from and to whom we owed the strength of the community—the miners who hewed the coal. The sculpture has pride of place at the bus station, where everyone can see it as they come into Glenrothes.

Glenrothes Development Corporation, with remarkable foresight, appointed the first-ever town artist. Over the years, David Harding and Malcolm Robertson delighted, amazed and amused children and their parents with huge stone creations. Glenrothes was the template for the appointment of town artists in other towns across the UK and beyond. My one regret about the demise of the Glenrothes Development Corporation is the loss of the town artist. I recognise that these are difficult times for local authorities and the arts and that priorities need to be established. However, it cannot be beyond local authorities to encourage the inclusion of a work of public art in medium-scale building developments.

The legacy of the town artists remains. In every precinct of Glenrothes, there is a piece of public art to admire or to be amused by. The giant blue and yellow irises, which were such a hit at the Glasgow garden festival, were repatriated back to Glenrothes and now nestle among the real spring flowers. There are also the horse and chariot in Caskieberran, the giant hands at Collydean, the chairs and television at Pitcoudie, and the totem poles and the old man and woman having a blether in the town centre. Everywhere there are giant stone mushrooms.

We all have favourites. I have two. Who could fail to love the family of hippos that inhabits the town park. They amble out from the River Leven to wallow in the paddling pool, sometimes sharing it with the local children. Then there are the poetry slabs, with snatches of verse by some of Scotland's finest poets: Bud Neil's sad tale of wee Josie's skintit nose; and the works of Joe Corrie, the miners' playwright and poet. In passing, let me say that it is beyond time that the arts establishment in Scotland recognised Joe Corrie's enormous contribution to Scottish literature. Corrie was referred to by T S Eliot as

"the greatest Scots poet since Burns",

yet he is all but forgotten.

I will wind up with a small snatch from Joe Corrie's "The Image o' God", which is etched into

the stone slabs in Glenrothes and into the hearts and minds of miners and their families everywhere.

"Crawlin' aboot like a snail in the mud,
Covered wi' clammy blae,
Me, made after the image of God—
Jings! But it's a laughable tale."

I urge the minister to promote public art works and to encourage local authorities, developers and architects to work together to achieve that end.

16:26

Gordon Jackson (Glasgow Govan) (Lab): Ian Jenkins said that he was being asked to speak on something that he knew nothing about. Well, he and I both. However, that lack of knowledge has not bothered anyone else, so why should I care either? I thought that I was keeping up with proceedings until Lord James got to King Alfonso of Castile, at which point I realised that I was heavily off the pace.

I do not know much about architecture, but I know that it matters. I do not have a lot of time for people who say that our surroundings do not matter. They are of great importance—and not just because of our national heritage and the big buildings. I am a great fan of the big buildings—how we design them is important—but they are not the only public works that matter. It is important that people have a sense of pride in where they live and work. That can sound twee and sentimental, but I think that it is important. To put it in simple terms, people need to like where they are. I accept that other things may be more important to them. For example, to most people, the standard of schools or of health care may, on a day-to-day basis, be more important. However, we need to recognise that we are affected, and that our behaviour is affected, by the sense of belonging that we have to our surroundings. That is why I say to the minister that I welcome any initiatives in this area.

I was a little disappointed in Michael Russell today. He was in one of his more nit-picking moods, if I might make so bold as to say so. It is a good thing that we are having this debate at all. Someone said that no Parliament had had such a debate before.

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

Gordon Jackson: I have to last six minutes, so I am delighted to give way.

Michael Russell: I am only sorry that I cannot offer Mr Jackson his usual fee. I am glad that he is delighted with the minister and the chance to have a debate. There is nothing wrong with a chance to have a debate. However, the substantive point that I make to the minister—I have made it to many other people as well—is that the motion welcomes a policy on architecture, but the Executive has admitted that there is no such policy and that such a policy may be some weeks away. Would it not have been better for the Executive to have come to the Parliament with a policy to debate, so that members had something to talk about, rather than coming here with an anodyne motion and no policy?

Gordon Jackson: I do not think that this has to be the only debate on architecture in the history of the world. There is nothing wrong in starting here, with this debate. Increasing the public's awareness of the subject is important—the subject needs to matter not only to architects.

Robin Harper entered into the argument about whether architects or the other people involved were the more important. The groups are not mutually exclusive. Someone once said that good architects need good clients. We begin to have good clients only when the public cares, so I welcome the debate.

In my usual parochial fashion, I will mention a couple of things that have happened in Glasgow in the last wee while and that I found to be interesting in this context. In my area, we had a local architectural awards ceremony. It was a small-scale, simple ceremony run by a local heritage society. One award went to Railtrack for redoing the local rail station. Another went to a woman who had turned a wee shop into a cafe. Someone else added an extension to their house and got an award for that. It was not the Royal Institute of British Architects award ceremony with flashing lights and Government ministers, but it was good. I went along because I thought that I should. I did not know whether I would be impressed, but I was, because I came away slightly more conscious of what was happening in my area. Many people came away thinking that how they did their houses or shops mattered and that people cared about it.

Not long ago, Glasgow School of Art—which is itself worth a visit—held an exhibition of entries to a competition, run by the French Government, to design social housing. The architects were allowed FF500,000 or £50,000. Approximately 50 architects had designed social housing and there were models and plans from them all. Some were off the wall—they would not have played well in Glasgow or anywhere north of Nice—but others were excellent. The exhibition showed me that it is possible to have much more imaginatively designed places in which to live.

Some interesting American work was done on the decline of what Americans call public housing. Public housing started off extremely well in America but, as people lost interest in the subject, it became in a sense the sort of decking that Cathy

Jamieson talked about. I encourage the Executive to address design in its policy. That is already happening—for example, as some of us know, housing associations in the east end of Glasgow are producing excellent developments. I have a personal friend who runs one of them. He will undoubtedly win awards for the work.

I sometimes go into areas in my constituency and, without being patronising, say to myself, "If I had to live here, how would I behave?" I do not think that surroundings are an excuse for bad behaviour—I am not stupid—but I look at the situation and think that it would adversely affect my conduct. This issue is important in a range of ways. I am glad that we are having the debate and, like Michael Russell, I look forward to the next debate, when we consider the fully developed policy.

16:33

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It falls to me to close for my party and, in doing so, I pay tribute to the excellent contributions that have been made from all quarters of the chamber. As it is the election season, perhaps it is not surprising that Michael Russell chose to do his R101 of politics—lots of hot air, which will be struck by lightning sooner or later. The debate is a worthy one. The expression "dancing on the head of a pin" was used. If Michael Russell intervenes, I will refer him to the answer that Gordon Jackson gave him. There is a tremendous amount of good stuff in the Executive's report, which I wonder whether Michael Russell has read. The debate is moving forward, and the more we move forward the better.

I want to take a swipe at what I call retro-architecture. I am sick and tired of attempts in this country to look backwards and of the tendency to pickle architecture in aspic. The human mind is for ever exploring and experimenting, but that sits ill with our attitude to how we should build new buildings.

Buildings are about materials. Members should think about the history of the croft house and the way in which it developed from dry stone with driftwood or other wood—for example, bog oak—and heather, through to the tin revolution and mortar. Members also should think about the fact that today we are in the world of concrete and cladding. What can be done with cladding today could not have been done 20 or 30 years ago, yet we are still stuck in a rut.

Yesterday evening, I walked from the Barony bar to Gayfield Square. It was interesting to see the gap sites. Some have been quite well done, but others have not, and almost every one contains retro-architecture. I am not sure whether such architecture is a valid concept. If it is taken to its ultimate point, we end up with pastiche architecture and the horror of plastic, fake astragals on glass. We must move away from that. Why does it happen? We see the retro-attitude in all quarters. Those who read *Private Eye* will see that that guy Piloti has repeatedly had a pop at the Holyrood project. Such *Telegraph*-reading, backward-looking attitudes are no good. I probably should not name him, but the Prince of Wales and his comments on carbuncles exemplify what I am talking about.

As has been said, education is key. Grabbing young people, letting them learn in a superb architectural environment and taking them to building sites to see how new buildings are designed and constructed would do a lot. We are trying to get young people down to the Holyrood project to learn what it is all about. I see Lewis Macdonald nodding at that. I make no apologies for saying that it is time to stop looking backwards and to start looking forwards.

Gordon Jackson touched on the awards scheme, which is hugely important. In the Highlands, we have sought-after awards for new build, renovation, extensions and other matters. People fall over themselves to get into the system to apply for the awards and many people are looking to win one. That raises standards and raises the public's perception of architecture.

Mixing housing and retail was not mentioned today, but it is important. Many town centres have shops with flats above them. Shopkeepers used to live in those flats, but often they are now empty. However, the social mix that can arise when people live in such flats can make sense for first-time home owners or home renters. It is important to have people living above shops, to keep an eye on the shop below and what is happening out on the street. We should send a signal to our planners about that.

It would be wrong if I did not touch yet again on the Holyrood project, which is not just a superb architectural statement, but a statement of art. It exemplifies all that I said about looking forwards and not backwards. All the arguments were made well about the benefits of buildings and how they can make the lives of the people who live and work in them better, but it is worth remembering that siting the Holyrood project in a part of Edinburgh that was not the smartest is having a fantastic effect on that area. Members have only to ask any passer-by, taxi driver or bus driver what they think to have that pointed out right away. A building can, almost with a magnetic wave, affect what happens around it.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton gave an excellent speech and mentioned a galaxy of architects. If we asked Playfair, Robert Adam or any of those

architects whether they considered themselves architects in the Scottish vernacular—parochial architects—I think that they would take tremendous umbrage. Traditionally, Scotland was an outward-looking nation. Dutch architecture has had an influence—pan tiles can be found all along the east coast. My final plea is that we should not be too parochial and inward-looking about architecture, which would be a mistake. We should take our cue from the great Scottish architects of the past, look outwards and have the courage to build, to be different and to lead the world.

16:39

Mr Murray Tosh (South of Scotland) (Con): The debate is rather difficult to respond to, as it has ranged so far and wide. As Mike Russell pointed out forcefully—if a little aggressively—there is something of a void at its heart. One aspect that was missing was an approach to some planning issues from Allan Wilson. Several planning issues arose during the debate, which I will develop.

Ian Jenkins mentioned the substantial public disillusionment with the planning process because they cannot influence decisions about land use or any of the details of planning applications when they are being approved.

In changing our planning policy, we have to try to evolve systems that build in public participation much more at the planning stage, which is the front of the process, rather than at the development control stage, by which time most of the substantive decisions have been made.

A couple of years ago, the Executive did some research about amendments to the planning system. It would be useful to hear today if that will be developed and, if so, what the broad strands of the process might be. We have to try to speed up the local plan renewal process; we have to get the public geared into that process as much as we need to get them geared into discussions about architecture.

Ian Jenkins also worried about house types called Ascot being built in the villages and countryside of his constituency. As he rightly said, they are not of the local vernacular, they do not fit very well and they could be planted down anywhere. Robert Brown's attack on Acacia Avenue, however, might be best directed at the council rather than the developer, as it is the council that will be responsible for that monstrosity.

Such countryside development in much of Scotland strikes me as being about the exporting of urban populations and the inability to achieve suburbs on the edges of cities, within the transport and other networks that cities provide. They are an effective expulsion of communities to where land is available. Local authorities such as Scottish Borders Council, which is desperate for a population to sustain its local services, is keen to attract people to live in the Borders, but many communities become unsustainable in the strictest sense of the word as people are encouraged to travel back into the city, which serves only to contribute to congestion.

I raised a point about the green belt when I intervened on Ian Jenkins. We have been much too narrow in our use and interpretation of the green belt. We have seen it as an instrument to prevent rather than to shape, control, influence and lever development. If we are serious about expanding our cities, we have to allow opportunities for them to expand and develop. Using and developing the existing transport networks, we have to allow for retail uses—where that is appropriate—industrial and service provision and, above all, housing provision.

Another of the impacts of the over-restrictive green belt policy in Scotland has been the reverse phenomenon in the built areas of urban cramming. There is a tremendous pressure to develop every available piece of ground, which means that areas of land trade at phenomenally high sums of money because there is such a scarcity of development land. That increases the pressure to accept greater density.

Robin Harper raised a number of interesting questions about density and the appropriateness of green spaces. He asked whether we should try to revert to tenement life or to be suburban in our aspirations. The answer to those questions is that there are different market segments for different tastes. Some people will like to live one way and others another way.

During the week, Lewis Macdonald announced his "Key Sites Appraisal Methodology for Development Planning" document, which is potentially an important influence on future planning and design. It links closely with research on transport development areas produced by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, which many of us saw a few months ago. In essence, the RICS research suggested that we should revert to much more dense development in certain areas, particularly those that relate to transport hubs and key transport corridors. That is a significant debate. We need to find a forum for it, as it will influence so much of our built areas and it feeds directly through into planning and architecture.

If, as a society, we are going to go for high-rise, high-density development, well and good, but let us talk that through. Let us debate it, let us find out the implications and let us involve people in those decisions.

Robin Harper: Does the member agree that high density does not necessarily mean high rise?

Mr Tosh: Indeed. There are some excellent examples in "Key Sites Appraisal Methodology for Development Planning" that show how different designs on a site can achieve a given level of density without necessarily using high rise.

Having said that, there are people who like high-rise housing, particularly high-rise housing that has been modified and adapted in the light of experience. That makes the point that good design is design that provides for the needs and requirements of the people who use the building. There is not much more to it than that, if we think about it.

If we design schools, hospitals and houses to provide for the needs of users, we have provided good design. Cathy Jamieson made some excellent points along those lines. Mike Russell made a hugely entertaining, largely negative speech that was about as substantial as the ministerial speech he savaged. He should have congratulated the minister on managing a 40-minute speech in 18 minutes. His only substantive point was about VAT. As far as I recall, VAT was introduced in the mid-1970s, some time after we had stopped the large-scale demolition and clearance of our cities.

As that was the only factual point Mr Russell made, I am quite happy to correct him on it, but he had a point when he said that we should not have had this debate without the policy. Debating the issue again, with the policy, in a month's time will be rather artificial. We have suffered today from a bit of a lack of strategy. However, having said that, I suspect that it has been a much more interesting and useful debate than many of us expected. I hope that it is the beginning of our being involved by the Executive in the work that it is doing and in the debate that the Executive is stimulating in the wider community, which ought properly to be ventilated in the Parliament and among the public at large.

16:46

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I thank Linda Fabiani, Cathy Jamieson and Tricia Marwick for giving us something real and interesting to chew on. Robert Brown's rather unwarranted attack on the absence of the SNP members of the Social Justice Committee was way off-beam, given that this subject covers so many areas, including education, housing and health. He could equally have made an unwarranted attack on other members. It would be gracious of him to concede that the SNP's shadow Minister for Social Justice and shadow Deputy Minister for Social Justice are present. I agreed with the initial part of Allan Wilson's speech, when he said that this is an important debate but, as Bill Aitken said, it became a little vague after that. It was certainly vague on policy development.

I do not especially want to end the debate on a negative note—I am sure that members recognise that that is not my style—but I need to draw the Executive's attention to concerns raised by some of those who responded to the consultation, particularly to paragraph 1.3 in the opening chapters of the Executive's report, which states:

"Many respondents queried how the aspirations described in the framework document would be taken forward into implementation. Respondents noted that the document does not set out how a policy will be implemented and some expressed concern about the lack of firm proposals or action points."

That is not the SNP; it is the Executive's own consultees.

Allan Wilson: The member refers to the consultation document and the criticisms that are to be found in it. Perhaps he can tell us what the SNP's criticisms of the proposed policy document were and what contribution the nationalists made to the consultative process.

Bruce Crawford: Perhaps the minister would be good enough to tell us which policy announcements we are discussing today. In December, a press notice from Mr Wilson said that the Executive is developing policy. Well, the Executive is still developing policy. I wonder how long the gestation period is for Executive policy. After all, it took the Executive 12 months to come back with the contribution that other people had made. Perhaps, when the minister sums up, he would be kind enough to let us know when we can expect specific action to flow from this process. When can we expect various changes to legislation, amendments to regulations, instructions to local authorities and—crucially—the resources for pump-priming for change? It is legitimate to ask what the time scale is and when we will see the programme for action. If it is true that the minister will shortly be issuing a policy document for discussion, what are we doing here today, discussing the subject? We may be returning soon to go through exactly the same process.

No one doubts the importance of the subject matter, but what is the purpose of this debate, other than to listen to the minister's navel-gazing wanderings? Mike Russell obviously struck a few chords: almost everyone on the Executive benches has had a go at him. He must have hit home with some of the truth.

At a recent architecture event, someone said:

"The purpose of building is to meet human needs. It is about creating places in which individuals can flourish, it is

about reviving hope and realising potential in our communities and it is about helping to create and sustain a decent and inclusive society."

Those were the words of Allan Wilson, but he probably did not recognise them. He said them in Glasgow last December, or at least that is what the Executive's press notice says. Those are fine words and I hope that the minister means them—at least, I hope that he means what his press officer said. They are fine words, because one of the factors that will judge whether this debate has all been a waste of time is the specific plan of action that the Executive proposes, particularly for ecologically sustainable construction.

I particularly commend to the Executive the Finnish Government's programme for ecologically sustainable construction, which was introduced in 1998. In Finland, for the construction and property sectors, ecological construction is about paying much greater attention to such issues as the consumption of energy and water, waste disposal, indoor air quality, durability and the life cycle of buildings.

What have the Finns done? They have introduced a classification system for emissions from finishing materials to improve the indoor climate of buildings. They have ensured that half of their homes are connected to district heating schemes. They have instructed local authorities to incorporate ecological construction into their programmes for sustainable development. The construction industry has been directed to increase the use of renewable energy sources, and targets have been set for housing construction and the public sector. Two thirds of new single-family houses have heat-recovery systems fitted. Since 1970, all new buildings have had triple glazing fitted and a requirement for solar heating and geothermal heating is already built into the building regulations.

That is the sort of thing that we need to see being proposed in an action programme from the Executive. The Finns are ahead of us in so many other areas. If the minister wants to be true to the words that he used last December, we will no doubt see the Executive introducing an action programme to emulate the Finns during this session of Parliament. I look forward to that.

Murray Tosh talked about planning. I would like to touch on that briefly. It would not be difficult to begin to rationalise some of the existing planning and building regulations. At the moment, in many local authorities, individuals have to go through one door for their planning applications and another door for their building control warrants. Building control warrant costs are decided by the Executive, but planning fees are decided by the local authority. That is holding back development and opportunity. For goodness' sake, let us get that daft situation organised and rationalised in a real review, so that this Parliament can start to discuss some real issues, rather than the wanderings of a minister who wants to have a policy but is afraid to bring it before us. I urge the Executive to hurry up and get that done.

16:53

The Deputy Minister for Transport and Planning (Lewis Macdonald): In opening the debate, Allan Wilson emphasised the fact that matters to do with architecture and the built environment cross-cut with many other policy areas in the Executive and touch on the portfolios of a number of ministers. He set out the ways in which he intends to promote and implement policy objectives on architecture: first, by the continuing advocacy of the benefits of good building design and, secondly, by working with others to develop conditions in which good architecture can flourish.

There is one further way in which we can deliver on our policy commitment in that area; through the statutory framework that regulates development. The two principal components of that framework are the planning and building control systems, for both of which I have ministerial responsibility. This debate gives me an opportunity to say something about the place of design in the statutory framework and about what we intend to do to improve its effectiveness with regard to design quality.

Bruce Crawford: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. We have now reached the summing-up speeches. Throughout the debate we have been asking about new issues and policy developments and now we are getting that in the minister's summing-up speech.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): That is not a point of order. Please continue, Mr Macdonald.

Lewis Macdonald: I am sorry that Bruce Crawford again shows an unwillingness to participate in a proper debate on those matters. In response to the point—

Michael Russell: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. There have been rulings in the chamber that during summing-up speeches ministers should not introduce new material by making announcements. The minister clearly intends to make announcements, which has been ruled against previously. It is quite wrong to make announcements when summing up as it gives no chance for reaction; it is against the principles of the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Russell, the content of speeches is not a matter for me or for this chamber.

Please continue, Mr Macdonald.

Lewis Macdonald: Members who were in the chamber during Mr Russell's speech will recall that he spent 14 minutes asking us to make a policy announcement. Now, without having heard a policy announcement, he leaps to his feet to raise a point of order. Gosh, we cannot have Executive ministers making policy announcements in Parliament. That would never do.

Bruce Crawford said—

Bruce Crawford: Will Lewis Macdonald give way?

Lewis Macdonald: I will give Bruce Crawford an opportunity to come in again in a moment.

Bruce Crawford said that members' criticising Mike Russell's speech was a credit to Mr Russell, as if he had made some penetrating points to which we felt the need to respond. Members of all parties felt the need to respond to Mike Russell's speech because, of all the speeches in a two and a half hour debate, it was the only one that struck the wrong note, missed the mood of the chamber and struck a completely negative theme.

Mr Russell spent two minutes complaining that ministers had not said enough about policy and the following 12 minutes carping about what Allan Wilson had said, without suggesting one policy. One of the advantages of a full debate, which we have had this afternoon, is that it has given us a good deal of time—two and a half hours—to see whether we can find any published statement on architectural policy from the SNP. I am sorry to report to the chamber that, in two and a half hours, we have found no evidence of the SNP having produced a policy on architecture or the built environment.

Bruce Crawford: Will the minister give way?

Lewis Macdonald: In a moment, Mr Crawford.

As Mr Crawford wants to come in, he must have the opportunity to respond to one of the facts that we have discovered in the past two and a half hours. It is that typing in the word "architecture" on the SNP website produces the result, "No match found."

I will give way to Mr Crawford. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Crawford has missed his opportunity to intervene. I am sorry about that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Do you still want to intervene, Mr Crawford?

Bruce Crawford: I did not know whether Lewis Macdonald was giving way.

Lewis Macdonald: Since Mr Russell clearly has little experience of making policy, let me describe for him the process that we have followed.

We have approached architecture policy and policy on the built environment in a most inclusive way. The hundreds of responses to our consultation, which for him were a matter to be scoffed at and talked down, included many responses from organisations representing their communities. They included amenity groups, civic groups, heritage groups and representatives of the public who, unlike Mr Russell, welcomed the fact that the first ever national architecture policy would be brought forward by this Executive in this Parliament. It was welcomed by almost everyone, but sadly not by Mr Russell.

I am also sorry that Bruce Crawford could not welcome the consultation and that he felt that the opportunity to debate issues in advance of our policy being proposed and published is to be regretted. I am sorry that he could not take a more positive view. This debate was an opportunity for the SNP to respond to the consultation, as it failed to do so, but the opportunity was again missed.

I should make another point in response to Mr Russell's extraordinary comments. He is concerned that the launch of our architecture policy has been delayed. He is right; it has been delayed as a consequence of the UK general election. That may be of marginal interest to Mr Russell's party, but for those of us with responsibility for government, it is clearly a matter that we must take into account. It is important to say, in response to the debate, that the policy will be published next month.

I hope that the majority of members welcome the opportunity, which they have taken, to comment on the policy. When he prepares the final policy for publication, Allan Wilson will be able to reflect on what they have had to say.

Fiona Hyslop: The minister may be aware that the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland sent to members the document "Architecture: An Agenda for Scotland". In the nine points for early action, it asks the Executive and the Parliament to

"raise level of 'tolerable standard' for dwellings".

Only yesterday, the Executive rejected that.

Another point for early action is to

"implement change in the law of the tenement".

Again, when are we going to get the law of the tenement—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

The Deputy Minister for Social Justice (Ms Margaret Curran): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it in order for me to intervene on the Opposition's erroneous comments?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, I am afraid—

Ms Curran: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have yet to answer your first point of order. Ms Curran, you can intervene only on the member who is speaking; you cannot intervene on an intervention. Have you finished, Ms Hyslop?

Fiona Hyslop: I am very aware of the time.

Thirdly, the organisation asks for the introduction of

"energy assessments at point of sale for domestic property"

which is a point that Robin Harper raised. Why is none of the architectural bodies' proposals included in the Executive's policy? Indeed, where is the policy?

Ms Curran: Will the minister give way?

Lewis Macdonald: Yes.

Ms Curran: I thank the minister for giving way—I am clearly learning the Parliament's procedures.

Will the minister assist me in clarifying that, at yesterday's meeting of the Social Justice Committee, we made the Executive's position very plain? We recognise that reform of the tolerable standard is a very complex matter, but yesterday we were presented with a raft of amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Bill asking the Executive to include in the bill a requirement to install double glazing, for example. We did not think that such amendments were appropriate. The Executive made it clear that it will give the matter further thought through the housing improvement task force. Not for the first time, Ms Fiona Hyslop is misleading the chamber.

Lewis Macdonald: The majority of members in the chamber will have little difficulty deciding whether Ms Hyslop or Ms Curran knows the Executive's position and the decisions that were taken yesterday.

The fundamental issue for policy on both architecture and building development is that they should reflect and respond to the quality of the environment and built heritage in this country. The key principles underlying that aim were restated by Sam Galbraith last November when he updated and republished the fundamental national policy planning guideline 1, which will provide the framework to develop matters.

We of course acknowledge that, in the responses to the architectural consultation, there was criticism of the performance of the planning system with respect to design; that there is too great a gap between the system's intentions with regard to design and their implementation in practice; and that the planning system is not succeeding in establishing an effective framework for supporting and encouraging good design. Those criticisms have foundation and we need to address them. Murray Tosh was quite right to highlight the importance of improving public participation in the planning system; the Executive will continue to work on that area and seek wider views on it in very short course.

It is precisely to elicit and to respond to such views that we have consulted so carefully in the development of our policy. In regulating development, the planning system is not just concerned with individual buildings or projects, but with the wider picture—the spaces between buildings and the organisation and pattern of urban and rural settlements. A great challenge for the planning system is to deliver buildings of quality and high-quality wider environments.

I am aware that time presses, but I must respond to one or two points that have been raised. Like Des McNulty and Robin Harper—but unlike Mike Russell and possibly Bill Aitken—the Executive's role on the professional side of architecture and design is precisely to stimulate discussion through debates of this kind, not to lay down the law. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton made much the same point. It is important to be clear about the role of government in this process.

The issues of accessibility and energy efficiency that have been raised are indeed key for the building standards review and for our work on architectural policy. As Robin Harper will know, we are already examining sustainability aspects of building regulations, particularly thermal requirements and flooding and draining issues. That work will be pulled together later this year and a broad range of views will be sought on how to develop it.

Linda Fabiani mentioned accessibility. As I am sure she will know, that matter is already subject to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which requires designers to take access into account. Andy Kerr has already brought the specific issue of Hairmyres hospital to our attention and it is being investigated even as we speak.

We should all reflect from time to time on the fundamental purpose of building and architecture. It is to meet human needs; to create places in which individuals can flourish; to revive hope and realise potential in our communities; and to help create and sustain a decent and inclusive society. If we lose sight of those aims, we are in danger of losing sight of the real and lasting benefits that good architecture and design can bring. It is too important a matter for us to neglect. I commend the motion to the Parliament.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. Before I ask Tom McCabe to move motion S1M-1936, I point out that there is a printing error in the business bulletin. The rule that is referred to should be 9.5.3B—the B is missing.

17:05

The Minister for Parliament (Mr Tom McCabe): As members will know, there is a requirement for a minimum period of time between stage 2 and stage 3 consideration of a bill. Following two public holidays, the period between stage 2 and stage 3 of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Bill will be only eight days. As a result, we ask the Parliament to suspend standing order 9.5.3B so that we can move to stage 3 consideration of the bill on 30 or 31 May.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that Rule 9.5.3B is suspended for the purpose of taking Stage 3 of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Bill.

Decision Time

17:06

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): There are two questions to be put today.

The first question is, that motion S1M-1929, in the name of Allan Wilson, on architecture and the built environment, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament acknowledges the social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits that good architecture and a well designed built environment can bring to Scotland and further acknowledges the benefits of a national policy on architecture.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S1M-1936, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, on the suspension of standing orders, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that Rule 9.5.3B is suspended for the purpose of taking Stage 3 of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Bill.

General Practitioners (Rural and Island Areas)

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): Our members' business debate today is on motion S1M-1897, in the name of Tavish Scott, on rural and islands general practitioners.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the particular pressures relating to the delivery of primary health care in rural, remote and island areas of Scotland; supports the work of the Remote and Rural Resource Centre based at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness, encourages consideration of the particular challenges of recruitment and retention of GPs in areas such as Shetland given the high on-call commitment made by GPs in small rural practices, recognises the importance of equity in the remuneration of GPs and encourages the further development of proposals to assist in their recruitment and retention in rural, remote and island areas.

17:07

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I begin by expressing my concern over yesterday's court ruling regarding minimum prices for common remedies, which will have an effect on rural pharmacists. I am sure that the minister is aware of that judgment and will reflect on the advice that has been given in respect of it. I hope that he might also reflect on the importance of the Scottish Executive's essential small pharmacies scheme. At times, I wonder whether the 21st century is to be dominated by the Asdas and Tescos of this world. Their role in our lives appears to have grown much out of proportion. I ask for some consideration to be given to that important issue and to the effect that the court ruling will have on rural pharmacies.

I have held a series of useful meetings with general practitioners around Shetland, and with Shetland Health Board, which concluded last Friday with a helpful briefing on this subject. This afternoon, I shall reflect on some of the concerns that have been raised with me. I recognise the fact that my constituency is not unique in experiencing difficulties, and some of the points that I shall raise will be equally applicable to many parts of Scotland. I am sure that other members will acknowledge that.

There is a need for a package of measures to tackle the undoubted problem of the recruitment and retention of good local GPs in rural health board areas such as Shetland. As was explained to me last week, that difficulty reflects the nature of a GP's lifestyle in such remote areas. Shetland has six single-doctor practices, three two-doctor practices and one seven-doctor practice, which is in Lerwick. There are currently two GP vacancies in the Lerwick practice and of serious concern is the fact that nine GPs have left that practice since 1995—the majority for reasons other than ill health or retirement. That turnover is significant, if considered proportionally, and the situation must be addressed.

The main concern is the out-of-hours work that is undertaken on a rota basis in such practices. Lerwick recently lost a GP to Elgin, where a co-operative system is in place that means that less time is spent on call. Such arrangements are a great incentive to people with young families and other interests in life. For those reasons, I suspect that Shetland's problems are reflected in other parts of Scotland. Larger practices, which often operate on a co-operative basis, can offer economies of scale, in a sense. As was explained to me last week, that is the difference between the situation in Elgin and the situation in Lerwick. However, if a co-operative could have worked in Shetland, it would have been tried. That point was made to me by the chief executive of Shetland Health Board last Friday. The sheer inaccessibility that is a feature of the geographical circumstances, the need for ferries and the miles of single-track roads make the idea of running an out-of-hours rota system for Shetland a non-starter. In addition, cross-area systems do not work in areas such as the north isles for the simple reason that the ferries between Fetlar, Unst and Yell, the most northerly islands, stop at 10 o'clock at night. Practices have to be located on each island, which exacerbates the problems.

Just as public demand for our health service is ever increasing, so our medical students demand ever more in relation to their conditions of employment. Recruitment issues are changing and the contrast, in terms of out-of-hours rotas, between a practice that offers a co-operative approach and a single-GP practice in Shetland is considerable. In addition, the balance in graduating medical students has tipped towards women, who may choose part-time work patterns. Furthermore, many graduates choose a work pattern that includes work abroad. As a result, if we are to attract graduates and experienced people into areas such as Shetland, the package that they are offered needs to be more attractive.

The overall package must include relocation expenses. Shetland Heath Board advises me that it can offer relocation expenses to consultants, nurses and associate GPs, but not to primary care GPs. In many areas, however—including the public sector—relocation packages are offered. GP practices are penalised for their independent contractor status. A change of policy for the islands and other remote areas would help with the recruitment and retention of GPs. Housing, particularly the availability of short-term housing, must also be considered in partnership with the appropriate agencies.

Salaried contracts for GPs were introduced recently. Last Friday, Shetland Health Board was given an assurance that, from that day onwards, island health boards could employ salaried GPs under the primary medical services arrangements. I understand, however, that the indicative budget for Shetland is £50,000 in the first financial year. When that money is shared out among the 10 GP practices and 20 GPs in Shetland, it will not make the difference that is necessary. In addition, given that there is to be a move towards a salaried GP scheme, the amounts of money that have been announced are inadequate, as self-employed GPs do not pay themselves by the hour, particularly when they are on call to a considerable extent.

Formulae for primary medical services do not work when they are applied rigidly and, as I argued when the Arbuthnott mechanism was introduced, often they do not reflect island circumstances.

There is a need for a package of measures to tackle recruitment and retention in Scotland's island, rural and remote areas. The primary medical services investment must be considered in detail in co-operation with GPs and health boards. Thought must also be given to the importance of retaining GPs, a remoteness element to the funding package for GPs in remote areas and a package to help with relocation, including short-term housing. Added together, those measures could provide a stable package for building a strong and successful primary care sector in the area in which it matters: the treatment of patients.

17:15

Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP): I start by congratulating Tavish Scott on raising this important issue. When we debate health issues, there often seems to be a concentration on the problems of conurbations. I do not think that saying that in any way denigrates the problems of conurbations—we need to consider the various needs of the various parts of Scotland. All our health policies and debates should be based on needs, and Tavish Scott made important points about that in his speech.

I represent a rural area—Moray constituency. The area has several large towns such as Elgin, but there are also remote areas. There is a huge difference between Elgin and the Braes of Glenlivet, and between Buckie and Tomintoul. In some of those more remote areas, if somebody's mobile phone actually works, they think that that is a miracle, and will jump out of their car and cheer.

When we consider the provision of health services in rural areas, we are talking about basic health services, and about the distances that GPs and pharmacists have to travel, often over insufficient or poor roads. They face higher fuel costs, which is a continuing problem in rural areas.

I also echo what was said about the likelihood that many rural pharmacies will disappear following yesterday's ruling. Small local pharmacists are the first point for many people who need assistance. The pharmacists know the people and they know the GPs and they are able easily to make a reference to a GP if they feel that help is required beyond that which they can provide. I am worried, because I do not see Tesco, Asda and others moving to Yell or, indeed, to Tomintoul.

We must consider the burden of paperwork that is placed on GPs, as well as the time that is demanded of them. It is sometimes the case that practices are one-man or one-woman practices and it is very difficult for doctors to do all the work that they are expected to do, including the bureaucratic case work. Staying in a rural context, our GPs are very important for those places where we have managed to retain small local hospitals where minor surgery can be undertaken, and where respite care is available to local families.

When I was looking at the Scottish Parliament information centre document that was provided for us as a background to this subject—"Medical Practices (Formulae)"—notional figures and their use in the formulae that are used in calculations for the recruitment and retention of doctors are explained. I do not like the idea of a notional figure, because patients' need for help is not a notional idea, but a reality. Every patient should be treated not in a notional way, but in a real way. While reading that SPICe research note, I felt almost that I was sitting a standard grade arithmetic test and I wondered whether a Scottish Qualifications Authority marker would be available. I have not seen so many multiplication signs, division signs and fractions for a long time. The complexity of the formula is in its being totally number based—account is not taken of the geographical areas that are covered.

I recognise that improvements have been made. Information technology has been helpful, as has been the use of helicopters, particularly in the Highlands. The local health care co-operatives have also been referred to. In my area, we have Moray docs and G docs—meaning Grampian doctors—and they contribute substantially to ensuring that the co-operatives work. That does not mean that somebody will always see their own doctor in an emergency, but they will probably get the chance to see a doctor who has, at least, had some sleep.

Recruitment and retention must be considered seriously, as should as the formulae that are used, which take very little account of remoteness.

17:19

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Tavish Scott on securing the debate. There is no doubt that GP provision is extremely important to people in rural and remote communities. For them, it is the front line of access to health care, and it is vital that the service meets their needs. I agree with a lot of the sentiment behind Tavish Scott's motion and I pay tribute to the work of the remote and rural resource centre at Raigmore hospital.

More work needs to be undertaken to consider the particular challenges of recruitment and retention of GPs in rural and remote areas. We need to highlight the benefits of rural practices to GPs and other health professionals. Such practices provide a better quality of life and work experience that is not available anywhere else. GPs in remote areas are at the front line of medical and emergency services, which gives them a range of skills that they could not attain anywhere else. If we are to give people access to GPs, high on-call commitments will always be part of working patterns in remote areas, but we should explore ways of compensating for that, such as using salaried GPs and allowing more time off by expanding the provision of locums.

I will concentrate on one local issue, which is the on-going dispute between Highland Primary Care NHS Trust and local residents in Helmsdale, about proposals to merge their GP services with the Brora practice. There is considerable frustration and anger among local residents about the way in which the proposals have been handled. There has been a series of public meetings, but far from rectifying the situation, they have added to the sense of frustration. Against the wishes of the community, the trust has now decided to extend the Brora practice so that it will also cover the Helmsdale area. The issue that is at the heart of the dispute is that Helmsdale residents want access to a local GP, but do not feel that the current proposals address that wish properly. They also believe that the trust has forced changes through without taking on board the views of the community.

I find it difficult to understand how trusts are influenced by Government policy. The thrust of the Government policy, as shown by the Arbuthnott recommendations, is to decentralise and in so doing to recognise the needs of rural and remote communities. The perception among residents in Helmsdale and elsewhere is precisely the opposite. The trust's decisions seem to run against the thrust of Executive policy. The lack of meaningful consultation and of implementation of Government policy on the ground need to be addressed. The issues need to be resolved to hold the confidence of communities.

17:22

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Tavish Scott, the member for Shetland, on securing the debate. As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I know the problems only too well.

The aptly titled "Crisis in Care: A GP Dossier", which was produced recently by the British Medical Association, paints a sad picture of the morale of GPs in the UK. It says that many doctors are leaving the profession or retiring early due to the intolerable burden of red tape that is imposed on them by the Government. Our doctors are losing heart because many of them know full well that the increasing burden of paperwork, red tape and targets means that they are failing their patients, which goes directly against the Hippocratic oath, which every doctor must swear.

The problem is exacerbated in rural and island areas, where doctors have to cope with the extra strains that are caused by extremity of location and blanket regulations that are often too broad to deal with specific situations. To put it in medical terms, general remedies do not generally cure specific ailments.

I have been closely connected with the recent problems that were faced by the doctor in the Dalmally practice. Sadly, the fact that she was refused an associate partner to cover her enormous work load led to her leaving the practice, much to the dismay of those who relied on her and had confidence in her as an excellent doctor. For some time, the area was served by four different locums, which led to a great deal of confusion and extra expense. Now Dalmally has an excellent new doctor, who has a locum for one week per month, but the problems have not changed. Surgery times have been shortened significantly, which has led to many people wanting to register in the nearby practice of Taynuilt. That is a sad and unsatisfactory situation.

As the debate is also about islands, I offer the example of people who are members of the Appin practice in Argyll who live on the island of Lismore. Four years ago, Sam Galbraith—then minister with responsibility for health—generously allowed them a 15-year-old Renault Espace to transport patients along the bumpy roads of Lismore to the point where they could be transferred to a passenger ferry to Port Appin, where they could be picked up by an ambulance. Surely, in 2001, those people should be served better, or are they simply to be forgotten? I admit that a helicopter could be used, but experience has shown that the average waiting time for a helicopter is two and a half hours—a patient can easily die within that time. Often, a Land Rover must be used if the Espace has broken down, which is not good enough. A proper ambulance with a retained ambulance man

should be available, in a similar way to a retained fireman.

Those of us who are old enough to remember the excellent television series "Dr Finlay's Casebook" will remember the high esteem in which rural doctors were held. I know that times change, but surely rural practices should improve for rural patients, rather than decline? One cannot base people's needs purely on statistics, because the geographical spread in rural areas dilutes all the effort. No consideration is given to the size of the area. As a result of the lack of public transport in rural areas, doctors are called out more often than they are in urban areas.

Dalmally has a single manned ambulance that cannot attend a road traffic accident, so the doctor must attend, which means extra work for the doctor. The ambulance can be used only as a taxi between homes and hospitals. Another example is that of the midwives who are based in Oban, which is 30 miles from Dalmally. Given the distance, the doctor often attends instead of a midwife—again, more work for the doctor. There is a tourist hotel that, over the year, produces 6,000 pensioner bed nights. Because the hotel's guests are frail, they often need a doctor—at any time of the day or night—which is also extra work for the local doctor. No account is taken of those extra pressures. Is it any wonder that we are told that doctors no longer want to practice in single-doctor practices?

It is heartbreaking for those who find it impossible to produce a reasonable service for patients in the present conditions. However, I was glad to hear that in February, the Minister for Health and Community Care, Susan Deacon, promised 50 new doctors and 50 new nurses for rural practices. I urge her to make certain that some of those doctors go to single-doctor practices, so that the work load drops from the present 112-hour week to only 84 hours a week. That is still a fairly onerous work load by anybody's standards, but it would at least be an improvement.

More medical services are being offered, but we must have the personnel to dispense those services. I cannot express strongly enough how important it is to country people to know their doctor personally and to have faith in him or her.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson): Come to a close please, Mr McGrigor.

Mr McGrigor: I am just finishing, Presiding Officer.

After all, confidence is half of what it takes to recover from illness. People in rural areas deserve health cover that is equal to that which is provided in urban areas. There should be no second-class patients and no two-tier system. It is necessary for us to reverse the decline in rural practices and to make them attractive enough so that those whose vocation is the medical profession will work in, make their homes in, and become pillars of rural communities, as they were in the past.

17:27

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I, too, congratulate Tavish Scott on securing the debate and I thank Rhoda Grant for her supportive remarks about the village of Helmsdale, which is in my constituency. I imagine that the people of Helmsdale little expected to receive as much coverage as they are receiving this evening. Nevertheless, their situation merits such coverage. If I say that the situation is peculiarly poisoned, members will understand what I mean.

Rhoda Grant painted the background to that situation, which should be of interest to the Scottish Executive because, in a small way, it illustrates precisely what is going wrong on the ground, despite the Executive's laudable intentions. Between Edinburgh and a remote village in the Highlands, communication channels are being broken, to say the least.

Dr Singh left the village of Helmsdale before Christmas. Shortly after Christmas, the Highland Primary Care NHS Trust announced that it was not going to replace Dr Singh. If any consultation took place with the community, it was derisory—the impression is that there was no serious effort to consult the people. The question of an advertisement arose, but the advertisement that appeared in the appropriate press was a joke. It was very small—one would need a magnifying glass to read it—and it was deeply discouraging, putting any would-be applicants off applying for the job. In comparison with advertisements on the same page for jobs in other areas in Scotland or the UK, it was particularly bad.

We have argued time and again with the powers that be, saying, "Look. Show good faith in the community. Why not readvertise just once? If you don't get a doctor after readvertising, we will accept that and we will have to amalgamate." In fact, in a private meeting between Mrs Alison Magee, who is the vice convener of the Highland Council, Rita Finlayson, who is the local councillor, Edward Mackay, who is a member of Helmsdale community council, and me, an undertaking was given to readvertise the post. However, the trust reneged on that agreement and said that no such undertaking had been given. With parliamentary privilege, I tell members that such an undertaking certainly was given. That leaves a very big question mark in my mind over the competence and integrity of the management of that trust. I choose my words very carefully.

Worse than that, there is an issue of distance in that area of the Highlands. The distances are impossible. If a practice in an area such as Brora is combined with one in Helmsdale and carries right on up the Strath of Kildonan, there must be a doctor who is locally based. If someone takes poorly right at the end of the strath, there is not nearly enough time to drive up to attend to that person.

During last winter, the severity of the weather in the Highlands was amply demonstrated. Roads were blocked, a train was blocked in and aircraft were unable to take off from Wick. That, too, seems to have been blithely missed by the health trust.

Mrs Alison Magee, the vice-convener of Highland Council, made the point at the meeting with the health trust that health in Scotland, the Highlands, and everywhere is—first and foremost—about patients and access to health. If there is a problem with doctors—if the job is unattractive and there is not enough pay or support, for example—that begs questions for the health authorities and for those in Government in Edinburgh. However, no such messages have come back from the health trust. As I said, the trust seems to be doing its own thing and ignoring the expressed wishes of and guidance—indeed, stronger than that, the cash encouragement—from the Executive to address matters of rural service.

I said at the outset that the situation is poisoned. The issue is serious in the area. I can do no more than say to the minister that I appreciate that the matter lies in the hands of the health authority, but I would be very grateful—many people in that remote area would be very grateful—if a watching brief at least could be taken at this stage, and perhaps an audit done of how the trust is conducting itself.

I want to quote from a letter from Helmsdale community council to Susan Deacon on the conduct of Highland Primary Care NHS Trust. It sums up things nicely. It states:

"The Helmsdale and District Community Council wish to express their serious disapproval and extreme concern over the conduct of the primary health care NHS trust in the filling of the GP vacancy in Helmsdale. The council also wishes to bring to your attention the sheer lack of professionalism shown by Ms Heather Sheerin, the chairman."

The situation is serious. Relations are poisoned and it will be hard to build them up again. The area seems far away from here, but the issue is important for a very special part of the world.

17:32

Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab): I congratulate Tavish Scott on securing the debate.

I should declare that I am a member of the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Medical Association. I have experience of working in a locality that stretched from Stirling to Oban and covered a very large geographic area—a locality that consisted of six practices. It was interesting because the practices represented the gradation from the suburban practice right through to the rural practice.

The problem is not in finite bits. There are particular problems for the islands and for some of the very remote communities that Jamie Stone referred to. The problem comes right through into less urban areas or geographically disparate areas. For example, the recruitment and retention problems in areas such as Kinross and Milnathort in my constituency are exacerbated by the fact that they are not in an out-of-hours co-operative. Over 80 per cent of Scottish GPs now work in out-of-hours co-operatives. Frankly, the out-of-hours co-operative movement saved primary care from disaster in the mid-1990s, when morale was at an all-time low, although some of my GP colleagues have forgotten that.

We need to examine carefully the problems for doctors in rural and island areas. I have already suggested that out-of-hours practice is a problem, but getting time off for training is also problematic. The clinical governance requirements in primary care are increasing substantially and GPs who work in isolation need to keep up to date. If there are three or four partners, the GP can share information with them and discuss problems and worries, but it is difficult if the GP is isolated.

Holiday leave is also increasingly difficult for rural and island GPs, because availability of locums has decreased. Locums are hard to get even in urban settings, but they are almost impossible in more rural settings. Rural GPs are also not able easily to participate in their local health care co-operative, which is the main thrust of development of primary care and is our main engine for change.

Of course, there are advantages to working in a rural or island practice—I will not repeat Rhoda Grant's speech—but GPs have to be able to take a multiskilled approach in primary care in such settings. For example, the need for good work in accident and emergency is important.

The minister will not be surprised to learn that I have a number of suggestions. We need to look again at the model that is used in the Australian outback, where young graduates are encouraged to take up posts that are hard to fill and, after a period of time, are given a bonus that helps them if they want to move back into urban settings. For example, although I was fortunate enough to work in the village of Bridge of Allan and obtain a house when property prices were cheap, no GP could

now afford to acquire a property in certain parts of that area. That is also true of some of the large cities. Doctors who might wish to practise in such areas may be prepared to spend some time in more difficult places. In that regard, I suggest that we need to consider golden handshakes and to consider paying the student loans for such doctors. Doctors' courses are longer than most graduate courses and a young doctor's debt is now very substantial. If that were done over a period of years, it would encourage people to move.

Relocation costs, which Tavish Scott referred to, need also to be examined. Why should primary care doctors be treated differently from other doctors? I see no reason for that. The issue should be re-examined.

Local health care co-operatives and primary care trusts should be strongly encouraged to employ young registrar doctors—that is, newly qualified GPs—to act as locums. That would give them enormous experience of working in the Highlands and might allow some to develop an appetite to experience the quality of life that comes from serving a community in the way that Jamie McGrigor mentioned. Such service gives enormous satisfaction, but unless one has tasted it and understood it, going to a remote community might be quite a fearful thing.

We also need to look at the use of NHS Direct. One of the things that we did for one of our more rural practices was to provide nurse and doctor triage so that any calls that were received were already known to be calls that were definitely valid and would not be problematic.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Wind up, please.

Dr Simpson: I am on my last sentences.

We are in the process of beginning to renegotiate the general medical services contract. I urge the Executive to join our Welsh colleagues, who have similar problems, in examining closely whether it would not be better to have specific contracts for rural, island and other disparate geographical communities.

17:38

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Tavish Scott's motion raises rural and island issues in relation to GPs. However, as a member for the Highlands and a member of the Health and Community Care Committee, I want to point out that the motion simply highlights the surface of a more deeply rooted problem, which is undoubtedly exacerbated by remote and rural issues.

Tavish Scott mentioned the need for a package of measures. Top of the list should be the inclusion of GPs in consultation, listening and working together throughout the health plan. Reading "Our National Health" is a case of spot the references to GPs. Section 9, entitled "Working together", does not even mention GPs in the list of key stakeholders. We must engage and work with our GPs.

Tavish Scott mentioned the remoteness of the Highlands and the difficulties of access caused by single-track roads. I point out to Tavish Scott that that is not something new; those areas have always been remote and the problems have been there for centuries. However, the problem that we face today is new and has recently come to the attention of many members within the Highlands. NHS 24 is one of the answers, although it cannot be the whole answer. Nevertheless, I look forward to the implementation of NHS 24, which will be helpful in remote and rural areas.

Recent articles in *The Herald* highlighted the fact that GPs are walking away from practices in Dundee, Glasgow and other cities in Scotland. The problems of recruitment and retention are not simply related to remoteness and rurality.

Tavish Scott mentioned the remote and rural resource centre at Raigmore hospital. I understand that that centre is considering 200 small projects instead of concentrating on the serious projects that Tavish has raised today and on the serious pressures affecting health care and access in remote and rural areas. The real issues are more GPs, more practice nurses, more professions allied to medicine, a more accessible service and the problems with out-of-hours services. One GP commented that the activity of the centre is spread so thin as to be invisible.

Tavish Scott mentioned that GPs in Shetland are retiring prematurely. That is the case throughout Scotland. In Fort William, three GPs recently retired early. That represents 25 per cent of the practitioners. At a recent meeting with GPs in Thurso, I was told that an excellent and much-respected young GP had decided that unemployment was preferable to her job as a GP. We cannot look only at GP services. In the maternity services in Caithness, the threat of downgrading puts additional stress on GPs.

I have often mentioned the Arbuthnott funding. It is there to address poverty, rurality, deprivation and access to services, but not one penny has gone to GPs in Caithness, Sutherland and other parts of the Highlands. Enough has been said about Helmsdale tonight, but it is incredible that, after the doctor walked out of Dalmally, the doctor from Helmsdale found that Dalmally was preferable to the stresses and strains of working in Helmsdale.

The BMA has recently remarked on the

problems of recruitment and retention. It said that 82 per cent of GPs reported that stress had increased; that 65 per cent had reported more bureaucracy; and that 76 per cent had reported that there was no sense of involvement in NHS changes. It is little wonder that all GPs in Scotland are being balloted at the end of this month, to highlight their plight and their strength of feeling over the resignation of their NHS contract by next year.

Much has been said about local health care co-operatives and the previous practice of fundholding. Whatever the rights and wrongs of fundholding, we did not put anything in its place to engage with the best practice of doctors.

GPs are being asked to do more and more, to provide more and more services to patients, but with less and less support. It is shocking that around 30 per cent of visits to GPs have a mental health component and that about 95 per cent of mental health care now takes place in the primary care setting.

At the top of the list of measures that Tavish Scott mentioned, I would like to see partnership, consultation and working together. The despicable things that have happened between the primary health care trust and the people of Helmsdale are absolutely ridiculous. At Scottish Executive level, we should be showing that the health department engages with our GPs, to show them how consultation and working together should be done.

17:43

The Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care (Malcolm Chisholm): I congratulate Tavish Scott on securing this debate. I have no difficulty in offering my full endorsement of the terms of his motion. I very much agree that primary care professionals who provide a service in rural, remote and islands areas face particular pressures when compared with their colleagues in urban settings. Those challenges are being addressed in a number of ways, through measures that have been in place for some time and through new measures that we have introduced more recently. I will speak later about the work of the remote and rural resource centre that was set up by this Administration. In so doing, I will say more about recruitment and retention in remote and rural areas.

Before that, I want to say a little about primary care in general and something about the court ruling with reference to which Tavish Scott began his speech. Clearly, that ruling may impact on remote and rural small practices—although it will not affect many other localities if there are not larger premises nearby. It will be an important issue for consideration as part of the current consultation on a pharmacy strategy for Scotland and will have to be discussed with the Scottish Pharmaceutical General Council as part of the negotiations on pharmacy pay.

Our overall commitment to primary care is clear. "Our National Health: A plan for action, a plan for change" highlights the paradox that although public attention focuses on hospitals, 90 per cent of contacts with the NHS begin and end in primary care. Contrary to what Mary Scanlon suggested, "Our National Health" underlines the importance of primary care. It commits us to continue to develop a range of service improvements, which will make primary care more accessible and flexible.

To do that, we have introduced a range of measures—there are many more in the pipeline—to improve primary care. They include the recently announced additional £18.5 million for personal medical services, about which I will say more in a minute; the £33 million that is being invested in new primary care premises through the primary care modernisation fund; the significant expansion of information technology, to which Margaret Ewing referred; the development of NHS 24, in close co-operation with GPs, which was welcomed by Mary Scanlon and Richard Simpson; and £10.8 million for a public health practitioner in each local health care co-operative. Work will be done on access to primary care services and the strategy on LHCCs is imminent. I could say more on primary care in general, but I must move on to the specific issues facing GPs in rural areas.

GPs serving rural communities receive the same fees and allowances as their urban counterparts. They also receive support through additional payments and schemes, which have been introduced over the years in recognition of the particular circumstances of practice in rural areas. First, the long-standing payment inducement scheme provides extra support to medical practices in the most remote rural and island areas. Secondly, the Scottish rural practice fund helps to compensate GPs whose patients are scattered over a wide area. Thirdly, the associate allowance enables single-handed rural GPs to employ an associate GP. Fourthly, rural GPs can apply for special locum allowances to cover the time that they spend away from practice to attend educational courses and to assist with the cost of out-of-hours cover.

Personal medical services, to which Tavish Scott referred, can also help to address recruitment and retention difficulties within primary care teams. An additional £18.5 million over three years for PMS was announced earlier this year. I emphasise that those are extra resources over and above the extra money to which I have already referred and the current enormous expansion in health budgets.

More than one member referred to the recruitment issue in Helmsdale. I visited the Highlands on Monday and was pleased to meet various people from community councils in Sutherland who drew the issue, among other matters, to my attention. Arrangements to fill the vacancy at Helmsdale are a matter in the first instance for the Scottish Medical Practices Committee and in the second instance for Highland Primary Care NHS Trust. It is a complex issue, which I cannot go into, but I assure members that we are putting in place new accountability review procedures, so when I say that it is the primary responsibility of those organisations, that does not mean that we are not taking an interest in that matter and in others.

One of the key issues is the high on-call commitment, to which Tavish Scott referred. Richard Simpson highlighted the importance of out-of-hours co-operatives. A review of out-of-hours services in Scotland was completed in October 1998 and a number of key recommendations have been implemented since. Funding was allocated for further research and we are now considering the subsequent report. The report of the out-of-hours review identified the need for additional support for rural GPs out of hours. The Highlands and the Western Isles were two of the areas that benefited from additional funding.

The motion supports the remote and rural resource centre that is based at Raigmore hospital in Inverness. As I indicated, I have no hesitation in offering my endorsement of it. There has long been a need for a body to handle specific solutions to the problems that are associated with delivering health care in the less populated parts of Scotland. That need was reinforced in the chief medical officer for Scotland's 1998 acute services review.

We have made the vision that is outlined in that review a reality by providing £8 million over three years to establish the remote and rural areas resource initiative. It has been operational for more than a year and is making its presence felt across a wide range of issues affecting remote and rural services. The recruitment and retention of staff and education and training tailored to their needs feature strongly, as does the development of new rural service models. One example is a pilot project that involves rural paramedics and GPs administering medication to prevent thrombosis. The value of that in rural areas is evident when we consider that a 30-minute delay is equivalent to the loss of a year's life expectancy.

Following consultation with the Executive, the initiative is also establishing a solutions group, whose remit is to explore and facilitate the introduction of innovative methods of delivering health care in remote and rural areas. The solutions group will consider options for redesigning primary care and community services in remote and rural areas and will consider such matters as PMS models, out-of-hours provision and the introduction of family health nurses.

Tavish Scott: Will Mr Chisholm take an intervention?

Malcolm Chisholm: Am I allowed to?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As long as you are both brief.

Tavish Scott: I will be brief. Does Mr Chisholm accept that the initiative can consider those issues, but that the primary issue relates to people, and so careful consideration should be given not only to imaginative solutions involving PMS, but to practical ways of placing additional staff in those practices?

Malcolm Chisholm: Tavish Scott referred to some matters with which I have not dealt. I will want to reflect on issues such as relocation costs.

My time is almost up. I referred to the family health nurse. We should be proud of the fact that we are piloting that new model of community nursing practice alongside the World Health Organisation and 16 other European countries. The Scottish pilot is examining the role of the family health nurse in remote and rural areas, with pilot sites in Highland, Orkney and the Western Isles. That innovative new model will prepare nurses to work alongside their GP colleagues better to meet the needs of our rural communities. We are all aware of the idea of the primary care team as an advance in primary care.

I thank Tavish Scott for drawing these matters to the chamber's attention. Much has been done, but I will reflect on the points that he and other members raised to discover what further progress can be made.

Meeting closed at 17:52.

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