

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 11 January 2006

Session 2

£5.00

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Produced and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by Astron.

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DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER—Nicol Stephen MSP

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MINISTER FOR JUSTICE—Cathy Jamieson MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR JUSTICE—Hugh Henry MSP

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MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE—Peter Peacock MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE—Robert Brown MSP

Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

MINISTER FOR ENTERPRISE AND LIFELONG LEARNING—Nicol Stephen MSP
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Environment and Rural Development

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT—Ross Finnie MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT—Rhona Brankin MSP

Finance and Public Service Reform

MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM—Mr Tom McCabe MSP
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM—George Lyon MSP

Health and Community Care

MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE—Mr Andy Kerr MSP
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MINISTER FOR TOURISM, CULTURE AND SPORT—Patricia Ferguson MSP

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MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS—Tavish Scott MSP

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11 January 2006

Scottish Parliament

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): Good afternoon and welcome back. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Peter Macdonald, who is minister of St George's West church in Edinburgh.

The Rev Peter Macdonald (St George's West Church, Edinburgh): I am pleased to be here.

When I was a teenager in the 1970s, the walls of my bedroom were decorated with pictures of my heroes. Pride of place went to my two favourite footballers: Jim Baxter and Charlie Cooke. Although they were nearing the end of their careers, to me they embodied what a Scottish footballer should be. They did not score many goals, but they were skilful and crowd-pleasing entertainers.

I lived in the west of Scotland in the early 1970s, when there were sit-ins at Plessey in Alexandria—where my father was a shop steward—and at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders. There were two general elections in 1974 and Govan featured prominently in that time of political upheaval. I also had pictures of Jimmy Reid and Margo MacDonald on my bedroom walls—I have not told Margo MacDonald before now that she was my teenage pin-up because I did not want to embarrass her. Jimmy Reid and Margo MacDonald embodied for me the best of Scottish politics all those years ago: they wanted to protect jobs and communities and to champion the rights of ordinary people over the schemes of distant politicians in Westminster. I am therefore pleased to be here today.

The Christmas season is about embodiment. Christians make the outrageous claim that the fullest revelation of the purpose and character of God—the creator of all things—is known in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. At Christmas, we therefore celebrate the birth of a baby who was born not in a place of power and political intrigue, but in an outhouse in a small town in Palestine. Christians claim that if a person wants to see God, they should look to that baby and to the man who he became. There is God—incarnate; made flesh; embodied; a vulnerable and helpless baby who was born into a sometimes cruel and indifferent world and was soon to be a refugee fleeing for his young life. We still claim him to be God incarnate, God embodied. That tells us something so

profound about the nature of God that we need to be constantly reminded of it because we are easily seduced by wealth, power, privilege and status.

Angel choirs, shining stars, wise men and poor shepherds are not in the Christmas story—which is a wonderful weaving together of mystery and myth—for decoration; rather, they tell of that child's significance and of how God is embodied in him. They tell of good news and hope and they symbolise God's love for all humanity, especially the stranger and the outcast.

Among my Christmas cards—which are now off to be recycled—I found the following short message:

“When the song of the angels is stilled
When the star in the sky is gone
When the kings and princes are gone
When the shepherds are back with their flocks
The work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.”

That is what each Christmas means to me. God gives that commission to all Christians. Let it also be your manifesto for the new year, and you too might be someone's pin-up.

Point of Order

14:36

Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP):

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I want to make a point of order of which I have given you and the Minister for Justice advance notice. I seek your advice on whether it would be better for me to pursue a course of action under rule 9.2.5 of the members' code of conduct, under rule 1.1(c) of the ministerial code, or through some other means in relation to the following matter.

On 23 March 2005, I asked the Minister for Justice question S2W-15561. I asked her

"what the original estimated costs were"

for the replacement criminal history system database. The minister replied that

"a separate budget was not defined."

At the time of receiving that answer, I therefore believed that it was not possible to answer my question and that the information that I sought on the original estimated costs was not available.

However, as the result of a freedom of information request that I made to the Scottish Criminal Record Office, I received the document that I have with me, which was produced in 2002 by the Scottish Police Information Strategy. It is entitled "SCRO Systems Replacement Project—Business Case" and it sets out the business case for the replacement criminal history system database project. Point 2 of the document lays out the initial costs estimated for the business analysis stage; point 3 talks about the initial hardware costs and the maintenance costs; and point 4 states the following:

"Table 2 illustrates the estimated costs for the new project."

The rest of the document gives all the estimated costs for the project, and they are laid out in that table.

The document clearly lays out the estimated costs for the project and is the direct and unambiguously clear answer to the question that I asked the Minister for Justice. Given that I asked for the estimated costs and that the document clearly provides the estimated costs for the project, why did the Minister for Justice fail to provide that information and, instead, provide an answer that I believe is misleading? Why was it necessary for me to use the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to obtain the information? Does the Minister for Justice take full responsibility for the answers that she publishes? If so, will she apologise to me and to Parliament for failing to

answer my question properly, and will she explain why that occurred?

Presiding Officer, I seek your guidance on what course of action I should take in order that I can obtain satisfactory answers to those questions.

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): I thank you, Mr Maxwell, for your advance notice of your point of order. Your point is now firmly on the record. You will understand, though, that while questions are a matter for me, answers to questions are the responsibility of the Scottish Executive. Any issues concerning the accuracy of the information supplied become, therefore, a matter for the ministerial code. You should raise your question directly with the First Minister.

Sustainable Development

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-3792, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the sustainable development strategy.

14:39

The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie): I cannot think of a better way of beginning the new year of this parliamentary session than by holding a debate on the new sustainable development strategy for Scotland, "Choosing Our Future: Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy".

If we go back a little in time, the Executive made its first tentative commitment to sustainable development in April 2002, in its publication "Meeting the Needs ... Priorities, Actions and Targets for sustainable development in Scotland". That document largely focused on resource use, energy and travel. Since then, we have succeeded in raising recycling and composting rates from a paltry 5.1 per cent six years ago to 17.3 per cent in 2004-05. We are also making substantial progress towards our ambitious target of 40 per cent of Scotland's electricity being generated from renewable sources by 2020, and we have radically refocused our transport expenditure so as to direct 70 per cent to public transport over the period of our 10-year investment plan. However, we acknowledge that there is much still to do. "Choosing Our Future" marks a step change, as it broadens and deepens our commitment to sustainable development.

First, I turn to the economy. We want to raise the quality of life of the Scottish people through increasing economic opportunities for all on a socially and environmentally sustainable basis. Economic growth is the Executive's top priority, but, as the sustainable development strategy emphasises, that should not come at any cost. We need to break the link between economic growth and environmental damage. We need to become smarter in how we use energy and all our other resources. That is not only a more sustainable approach; it is also sound business sense. There is huge scope for improvement. It has been estimated that wasted energy costs the Scottish economy approximately £1.3 billion each year and that the unproductive use of other resources costs Scottish manufacturing a further £300 million per year. That is why we want a vibrant, resource-efficient economy, with Scotland leading in green enterprise.

To deliver on that vision, we published our strategy for green jobs last year. As part of that strategy's implementation, we are reviewing how

we provide support and advice to business on resource efficiency. We continue to support the development and uptake of renewable energy technologies. We are also developing a new and wide-ranging energy efficiency strategy for publication early in 2006. In addition, we are supporting a range of initiatives and organisations, such as Envirowise, the Waste and Resources Action Programme and REMADE, whose aim is to help businesses to become more resource-efficient through waste minimisation and to support the development of markets for recycled products.

Secondly, it is clear that Scotland's global environmental impact has to be reduced. Like other developed countries, Scotland uses an unsustainable share of the world's resources. One estimate is that the average Scot consumes 2.4 times as many resources as the global average, and that if everyone consumed resources at the same rate as we do, we would need another two planets to accommodate us.

We in Scotland can make a practical difference. Combating climate change is a key priority. We are already committed to making an equitable contribution towards the United Kingdom's target to reduce CO₂ emissions by 20 per cent by 2010 and by 60 per cent by 2050. We will shortly publish the Scottish climate change programme, which for the first time will quantify that equitable contribution—or what we might more accurately describe as the Scottish share—and will set out how we are going to deliver it.

The Scottish climate change programme will focus on greenhouse gas emissions that are generated in Scotland. However, it is important for us to recognise that many of the goods and services that we consume have social and environmental impacts much further afield. We all need to become better informed and to be more demanding about the environmental and social credentials of the goods that we buy.

Approaches such as the ecological footprint, eco-schools, improving consumer information and the fair trade programme led by the voluntary sector all help to develop people's awareness of social and environmental concerns and the influence that we all have as consumers to demand more sustainable goods and to seek better policies.

Thirdly, there is the question of our natural heritage and resources. Scotland is blessed with some of the world's most outstanding environments. Our natural heritage supports key industries, such as farming, fishing and tourism, and the communities on which those industries depend. The sustainable development strategy sets out how we will secure a Scotland in which biodiversity loss has been halted, natural

resources are managed sustainably and our environment is protected effectively on the basis of evidence and using the best available science.

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Will the minister acknowledge that our marine environment is being protected by a complete guddle of legislation? We need a single marine act and, until we get that, we will not make any move forward in the protection of our marine environment.

Ross Finnie: I whole-heartedly agree. That is why we have been in active negotiation with Her Majesty's Government at Westminster, which controls certain elements of the marine environment. We cannot simply divide the seas around our coasts in an irrational way, so I am happy to support that approach. Clearly, we are looking for a better, more integrated approach. As I told the Environment and Rural Development Committee, once we know the exact thrust of the proposed Westminster bill, we will report back to the Parliament on how we in Scotland can take action that will merge with that legislation to enhance and improve our approach to the marine environment.

Our commitment to reducing the size of Scotland's global environmental impact is one reflection of our commitment to environmental justice. Another is the priority that the strategy gives to improving the quality of life of individuals and communities by securing environmental justice for those who suffer the worst local environments. We give effect to that priority through, for example, the investment that we are providing through the community regeneration fund. The fund is targeting £318 million over three years on regenerating Scotland's 15 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods. That work is supported by the regional outcome agreements that have been developed by each of Scotland's 32 community planning partnerships.

Sustainable development cannot just be left to someone else. It happens—or, in some cases, fails to happen—because of the choices and actions of politicians, businesspeople, public servants, volunteers, consumers and ordinary citizens.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): Further to the minister's point about sustainable development being dependent on our actions, is he satisfied that the Government is delivering on its commitment to ensure that all aspects of Government work in a co-operative and unified fashion to achieve that objective? I cite concerns, which I will detail later in the debate, about the strategic waste fund and the difficulties in achieving cross-departmental approval for wood-fuel heating systems in public-private partnership projects, which many of us have been concerned

about. Is there joined-up government on the issue?

Ross Finnie: On the member's first point about the lack of joined-up action in the implementation of the strategic waste fund, there is no disagreement between the Executive and local government about the objectives of the fund. There have been concerns—including in Mr Swinney's constituency, as he will no doubt inform us later in the debate—about some of the implementation. However, members should be in no doubt that the issue is not lack of co-ordination across the Executive but the timing of the implementation of the second phase of the fund. I am perfectly satisfied that my officials are dealing with local authorities fairly. Indeed, we have had many meetings on that topic with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

On the member's second point, which he has raised in previous debates, we are continuing to examine whether there is a disconnection between our clear desire to embrace renewable fuels, such as biomass, and our policy on PPPs. I have acknowledged that the apparent disconnection needs to be examined. We are continuing to look into that.

Let me continue by saying that that is why the sustainable development strategy places such emphasis on education and learning, on creating the structures and processes within Government and the wider public sector and on supporting all sectors of Scottish society in playing their part.

On that score, we have much in Scotland of which we can be proud. For example, participation rates in the eco-schools programme lead Europe. More than 70 per cent of schools are already registered, and we aim to have at least 80 per cent registered with the programme by January 2008.

Last year was the start of the United Nations decade of education for sustainable development. By no later than this March, we will develop an action plan on our contribution to the UN decade to cover education in the broadest sense, from schools to further and higher education and opportunities for lifelong learning.

We are embedding sustainable development in the processes of government, with the support of the Cabinet sub-committee, which the First Minister chairs and which brings together not just ministers but independent external advisers.

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): The strategy says:

"Investment in the school estate ... means that school children in Scotland will be learning in buildings that embody sustainable design principles."

How will the Executive ensure that that happens in reality? For example, version 3 of the Scottish

schools standard public-private partnership contract makes no mention of the environment or sustainability in its more than 200 pages.

Ross Finnie: Unlike Robin Harper, I have not spent my Christmas reading the 200 pages of the Scottish schools standard PPP contract. However, I am most grateful to him for drawing my attention to that omission. Indeed, I think that John Swinney was referring to the same omission in his earlier intervention. As a result, in response to Mr Harper, I can only repeat my answer to Mr Swinney. I am aware of the apparent disjunction and intend to take up the matter.

We have to provide some leadership in this area. I have announced that the Executive will reduce its own carbon emissions; that will provide compensation in that respect. We must make it clear that what we say and what we do are the same.

We are also working with all the public bodies on the matter. As Robin Harper and John Swinney have pointed out, we must ensure that, no matter whether we are talking about local government or the national health service, all arms and bodies of government should be joined up and committed to the environmental management of the public sector's various estates.

Of course, good governance is a key sustainable development principle. It is right that we should be open about how well we are doing and that we should be held to account effectively. To support that aim, we are developing and will report regularly against a new set of indicators that will replace the 24 indicators set out in our 2002 publication "Meeting the Needs". Moreover, we will publish the internal performance reports that we submit to the Cabinet sub-committee, and commission and publish independent assessments of our overall performance, including those from the Sustainable Development Commission.

Just as sustainable development presents new challenges to the Executive to change its ways of working, so it presents challenges and opportunities to this Parliament and the people of Scotland. The challenge is to turn the vision set out in "Choosing Our Future" into reality.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's new sustainable development strategy, "Choosing our future"; supports the strategy's vision of a vibrant resource-efficient economy with Scotland as a leader in green enterprise; welcomes its emphasis on reducing Scotland's global environmental impact, protecting its natural heritage and resources for the long term, improving the quality of life of individuals and communities and securing environmental justice for those who suffer the worst local environments, and calls on all sections of society in Scotland to play their part in delivering these objectives.

14:52

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Eighteen months ago, the Scottish Parliament information centre and the Environment and Rural Development Committee commissioned a report on whether the Scottish Executive was structured and positioned to deliver sustainable development. Mr Finnie has just highlighted a number of ideas that the Government has now fleshed out from its initial set of responses and our job this afternoon is to review the substance of those ideas and plans.

The Scottish National Party argues, with good reason, that the Scottish Government needs full powers over all the policy areas that will allow us to curb present-day Scotland's outside global footprint. Current behaviour in this country is helping to accelerate damage to the natural world, not least through CO₂ emissions that melt polar ice caps and affect the course of the gulf stream's warming waters on our shores. As the minister has pointed out, Scotland's footprint is about two and a half times the global average.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Given Mr Gibson's remarks about the need to remove CO₂ emissions, will he tell us whether the Scottish National Party is considering any change to its closed mind on nuclear power?

Rob Gibson: I think that our energy review will very soon make that clear.

As Scotland's footprint is two and a half times the global average, every Scot has to play a full part in combating climate change and occupying only their fair share of the world's limited resources. When we spoke yesterday, the former director of WWF Scotland, Simon Pepper, and I agreed that people find such changes easier if they form part of a sustainable development strategy than if they simply cause more stress and strain. Indeed, the situation is similar to the difference between the rail journey that we were on and commuting by car. We have to sell the message that sustainability can make life easier for people if they engage in the process. If people throughout the country help to maximise sustainability, that will bring about a dynamic and sustainable Scotland that can brim with green jobs and healthy communities. It is essential to give individuals, businesses, local authorities and communities the means and the targets to play their full part.

Our Government must put forward more than examples of best practice and a string of well-meaning—and, it has to be said, well-founded—ideas to teach our people about the actions that are needed to guarantee sustainability. Scots need detailed tasks and the tools that allow local action to build up into a national set of achievable

targets. For example, every home, every community, every school and every business has to conduct an energy audit and steadily replace the carbon emitting elements with green power and energy efficiency. That is the kind of template that we would like to see in the Government's proposals—it is the hands-on way to regain sustainable conditions for the country, and is where local actions will be most telling.

I welcome the Executive's pledge to review the evidence on the options for additional and improved ways of measuring progress, and the report pledges to deliver that by the end of 2006. However, the scale of the task and the urgency created by the 20-year window that we may have before climate change becomes progressively more serious cannot brook delay.

In its sustainable development strategy document, the Scottish Executive has identified many well-thought-out ways to make a difference. It shows the correct direction, but it remains far from being in control of the highway—or perhaps I should say the rail route—to sustainable success. Let us look at the pictures in "Choosing Our Future"—anyone who looks through the colour version of the document will see what I am talking about, because the pictures give the game away. There are some nice fishing boats bobbing about on the sea, but negotiating powers on fishing are held by Westminster. Power stations and chemical works are all subject to reserved powers. Energy efficiency in businesses—

Des McNulty: Will Rob Gibson take a further intervention?

Rob Gibson: Certainly not.

Who is to take the lead on energy efficiency in businesses in Scotland? We should be told. Oil refineries are subject to reserved powers, which is symbolic of a rip-off of a huge Scottish resource that could be used to create a sustainable future for the country.

I turn to other examples of opportunities from our marine resources. Scotland is surrounded by a quarter of Europe's seas. One might think that that would provide lots of room to organise in a sustainable way, but when we consider that, as has been alluded to, there are 85 acts and 13 regulatory bodies—most of which are subject to reserved powers—we must ask how we can make our marine areas part of the process of creating a sustainable Scotland. We could organise them if we had the marine act that the minister talked about, and it cannot come soon enough. Seven thousand green jobs could be provided from wave and tidal renewables, from locally managed sustainable fishing, from eco-tourism and from developing the exciting possibilities of carbon capture in the depleting offshore oil wells to help to

achieve sustainability targets. However, carbon capture is, at present, another thing that is subject to reserved powers. There has been investment from the UK Government of £25 million. Our neighbours across the North sea have invested £162 million in carbon capture already—six times as much as we have. Scotland deserves no less investment in that exciting way of trying to build sustainability.

On the question of protecting our natural heritage and natural resources, I have to ask why so many members found it possible to vote for national parks at Loch Lomond and in the Cairngorms but cannot explain how they will support the sustainable management of coastal and marine resources. We read about fishermen who are chary—

Des McNulty: Will Rob Gibson take an intervention on that issue?

Rob Gibson: Certainly not.

We read about Western Isles fishermen who are chary of a marine national park, and I can understand their concerns if they are going to have a whole lot of further controls placed on them by environmental bodies. However, the sustainable management of those resources must include the community and must make available a balanced use of the sea.

Ross Finnie: I always love scare stories about how people are going to be absolutely terrified. In fact, nobody has ever suggested that there would be anything other than a sustainable approach to running a marine national park. On what basis is Rob Gibson flying that scare kite this afternoon?

Rob Gibson: I am not flying a scare kite, but perhaps Alasdair Morrison, who is sitting behind the minister, will tell him some of the details.

We read that, in Wester Ross last summer, the local people were very concerned because they wanted a total ban on trawlers in the local prawn fishery ground. Putting local controls and visible policing in place will be the only sustainable way to control both mobile and static gear boats. The local community council feels powerless, but it could be taking such decisions about the area of the sea that is adjacent to the land. We are looking for some powers to be devolved in that way to allow such local management of the sea bed and the sea resource, if at all possible.

I will address what our Government and quangos can do. The minister mentioned some of the approaches that we can discuss. Earlier this week, I heard that Highlands and Islands Enterprise is about to appoint a sustainability officer. I hope that we hear of many more such moves and that we explain to the public that they do not bloat bureaucracy but co-ordinate the only

way in which we can make Scotland smart and successful. What templates will the Executive issue to its agencies and departments to kick-start their sustainability work? We heard about the problem with the waste strategy, and it is obvious that joining up the work is difficult.

However, the Executive could, for example, take a supportive role in respect of the centre for ecology and hydrology, based at Hill of Brathens, Banchory, which is under threat. The SNP is calling for the centre's sterling work on climate change to be expanded rather than rationalised. Can the Executive get behind the campaign to save it? We need to have organisations with such skills at our disposal.

We welcome the moves to increase green procurement. As 50 per cent of the Scottish economy is driven by the public sector, that is an ultra-important issue. Can ministers tell us whether the Scottish sustainable procurement action plan can be advanced from a start date at the end of the year to one that is earlier in the year?

This is a big subject. The report contains many chapters, and we can do many things—even with one hand tied behind our back. I am glad that well-being and mental health are seen as ways of placing sustainability in a human community context. Why not set targets for local delivery and democratic involvement that could ignite interest in sustainability and climate change mitigation throughout the nation?

I move amendment S2M-3792.1, to insert at end:

"and further calls on the Executive to set targets for individuals, businesses, local authorities and communities to play their part in reducing Scotland's global footprint while working to gain full powers for this Parliament over the key areas of policy that are needed to guarantee a sustainable Scotland."

15:02

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Here we are: another year, another debate on sustainable development and the same old Conservative party—or perhaps not.

In the spirit of constructive opposition, we are here today to try to take a different approach. The first thing that we have to say at the outset is that we take issue with very little in "Choosing Our Future". In fact, there is nothing in the Executive's motion with which we can take issue. Consequently, we have sought to add a little bit to the end of the motion rather than to delete part of it.

The truth is that the document has delivered something around which I think Parliament can now unite. It offers us a foundation stone on which Parliament can from now on build consensus on

sustainable development. However, it is essential that we now consider the question of what we will build on that foundation. Therein, we might find one or two issues on which we will disagree with other parties in the debate.

There are a number of issues that we must address to ensure that we get the debate out in the open, the first of which is—of course—economic stability in the context of sustainable development. Some members believe that we in Scotland should take the opportunity to set an example to the rest of the world and are prepared to see us go out on a limb to demonstrate how we could reduce our global footprint and how we could contribute disproportionately to the positive facets of sustainable development that we are here to discuss. I have concerns about that approach, which are shared by many people in Scottish industry. Many people in Scotland believe that the aims are laudable and that we must set high international standards and live up to them. However, if we go too far out on a limb, we will simply isolate ourselves by adding costs to our businesses, which will cost us jobs and undermine the economic growth that remains our number 1 priority.

Mr Ruskell *rose—*

Ross Finnie *rose—*

Alex Johnstone: I will answer the minister.

Ross Finnie: Will Alex Johnstone explain before he closes his remarks why better resource efficiency and use—which could save millions of pounds—are contrary to the interests of the Scottish economy?

Alex Johnstone: I will reiterate: I do not believe that those are contrary to the interests of the Scottish economy. I was not necessarily attacking the minister or the Scottish Executive when I suggested that there are members in the chamber who would be prepared to take action that would undermine growth in the Scottish economy. We must have a balanced approach, and the minister's opening remarks in the debate demonstrated that the Executive has such an approach. That is one of the things that I am prepared to praise.

Energy is one of the most important issues that we must address. The rush to wind power as the way to achieve the Executive's 40 per cent target remains one of the issues on which I am most regularly approached. Not only the construction of wind farms—

Mr Ruskell *rose—*

Alex Johnstone: I will not take an intervention at the moment, thank you.

There are concerns about the construction of wind farms and about the construction of the ancillary pylons that would be necessary to distribute the electricity that would be generated by wind farms. If we are to commit to reducing CO₂ emissions, there is more than one way we can go—we heard Des McNulty mention nuclear power. It is strange to hear nuclear power being mentioned in a debate on sustainability, but it is essential that I, and others who share my view, take the opportunity that is presented by the debate to say that we need to discuss the future of nuclear power. We need that discussion now, and although there are people—particularly the gentleman in the Scottish National Party—who take a different view from mine, it is essential that such a discussion be initiated and held now.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I fully respect Alex Johnstone's view, although I may not share it. I ask him only to consider the full-life costs of a nuclear programme. Only this week, a report suggested that it will cost £70 billion to clean the particles that are associated with the nuclear industry, particularly in the area surrounding Dounreay. How can anyone support nuclear power, given that the waste that it produces will last for thousands of years? Those are the real full-life costs.

Alex Johnstone: It will be appropriate to have a detailed debate on nuclear power on another day. Rob Gibson referred to the cost of our nuclear legacy: that cost will be with us whatever happens in the future, but technology exists today that will allow us to progress nuclear energy in Scotland without adding significantly to that legacy; we must take that into account when we debate nuclear energy.

Energy cannot be considered without consideration of energy efficiency. The Conservatives fully support the moves to promote energy efficiency in Scotland and we believe that the Executive is working hard in that area. We also praise businesspeople who have taken the opportunity that has been afforded them by high energy costs to deliver on energy efficiency in a way that adds to their businesses' profitability. With high energy costs, energy efficiency becomes a priority for business.

As for producing energy-efficient housing—

Mr Ruskell *rose*—

Alex Johnstone: I must make progress.

It is essential that energy efficiency in housing be achieved without adding significantly to the upfront cost of affordable housing. Although we must strive for energy efficiency in housing, if that makes housing—particularly at the lower end of the market—less affordable, it is a threat to all that Parliament stands for. Therefore, any action on

energy-efficient housing must be taken in such a way as to prevent additional upfront costs for affordable housing.

Let us consider the food and farming industry. Although it is not entirely Ross Finnie's fault, the Scottish farming industry appears to have gone into terminal decline on his watch. How sustainable can we be when much of our food—even in the organic sector—is imported?

Current policy affords us a great opportunity in biomass and biofuels, which we must encourage. There is a genuine appetite among farmers to become involved in that industry, but some confusion remains. I ask the minister to take the opportunity to deliver decisive advice on how Government can help to kick-start that fledgling industry. Farmers are ready and are waiting for the green light.

I have tried to adopt a constructive approach that the Conservative party will perhaps pursue in the years to come. I genuinely favour the adoption of a blue-green agenda and a consensus of constructive opposition that will start today and will be rewarded if it finds a friendly face.

I move amendment S2M-3792.2, to insert at end:

"but considers that vision and aspiration, while commendable, will not of themselves deliver for future generations and therefore the Executive must begin to deliver greater tangible evidence of its own commitment."

15:11

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Nearly 20 years since the Brundtland commission and 13 years since the Rio earth summit, we finally have a sustainable development strategy for Scotland. Even for the Tories, the debate has moved on from whether we need sustainable development to how it is to be delivered.

The latest rhetoric is the best yet. As a report, the strategy hits all the right notes, covering economic and social as well as environmental issues. In the words of Jack McConnell and Nicol Stephen in the foreword, it recognises that

"Sustainable development is a concept easy to subscribe to, harder to put into practice."

That is very true for Nicol Stephen, who will apparently open a wind farm tomorrow, even though as Minister for Transport he rolled over on the M74 extension and opened the cheque book when it came to the Aberdeen bypass. On the sustainable development front, more wind power is great, but more congestion, more pollution and more noise are not so good.

As the minister acknowledged, for the strategy to be meaningful, it must represent a step change in Government thinking rather than be merely a

green bolt-on. The gap between the rhetoric and the practice must be bridged. Whatever their portfolios, ministers cannot duck the tough decisions that sustainable development demands they take.

Bruce Crawford: On tough decisions and strategy, will the Green party support planning for a new Forth road bridge if the existing bridge proves to be economically and technically unsustainable for the future?

Mark Ballard: Forms of public transport such as rail are the only sustainable way of getting large numbers of people across the Forth; roads will never be the answer. We could have a second, a third and a fourth road bridge without ever dealing with the tough decisions that need to be taken on sustainable development. When we talk about sustainable development, we must think about the future. The minister mentioned that the amount of resources that people in Scotland use is so great that if people in every other country lived in the same way, we would need two extra planets. That is the limit of which we must take account when we consider building more roads or bridges.

We welcome the strategy's rejection of growth at any cost, but growth—the measure of which is, I presume, gross domestic product—remains the Executive's top priority. As I have argued before, GDP growth is a measure only of an increase in the flow of money in the economy. GDP cannot measure costs, so it is not the measure to use if ministers really reject growth at any cost. We must hear from the First Minister on that. If the sustainable development strategy, which has been signed off by Jack McConnell and Nicol Stephen, is so important, why is the Minister for Environment and Rural Development leading the debate rather than the First Minister?

Ross Finnie: While asking that question, will Mark Ballard also explain why his leader is not leading in the debate?

Mark Ballard: Jack McConnell's and Nicol Stephen's faces and signatures are in the document.

Sustainable development requires that society, the environment and the economy—the three pillars—be considered together. To put the economy first, as the Executive so often talks about doing, continues the neo-liberal dogma of cash first, clean up later. That approach is clearly taking us in the wrong direction.

We need to mainstream sustainable development. I agree that there is a section on the subject in the document, which states that the Executive will

"set out how its spending plans contribute to sustainable development objectives."

At a meeting of the Finance Committee back in November, I asked the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform whether he could tell me how much of the Executive's budget is targeted on sustainable development. His reply was:

"No; I think that it would be impossible to do that."—*[Official Report, Finance Committee, 7 November 2005; c 3024.]*

Will "Choosing Our Future" mean a sea change in the thinking of the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform on the budget, or will the Finance Committee have to point out to him again next year the impossibility of scrutinising spending on sustainable development as well as on the other cross-cutting themes?

Of course, as Rob Gibson mentioned earlier, the biggest sustainable development challenge at the moment is climate change. It is the environmental bottom line that will drag down economic and social progress unless countries such as Scotland, with all its natural advantages, can blaze a trail. The overdue Scottish climate change programme is eagerly awaited. The Scottish share of carbon reduction that the minister talked about looks and smells like a target, but the question is this: what will it include? Will it include air travel, which is conspicuous by its absence from the document under debate today? We need a national greenhouse gas reduction target that binds ministers to taking tough decisions and real action in every sector.

There are huge opportunities for Scotland to lead the world to a low carbon economy. In addition to reductions at home, we can help the rest of the world to reduce emissions and I say to Alex Johnstone that we would gain significant economic benefit from doing so. In a global marketplace, home-grown companies such as Ocean Power Delivery Ltd must be nurtured and their bases must remain in Scotland.

It is time for an energy strategy that allows renewables and energy efficiency to work together. That would also demonstrate that nuclear power—which is energy that relies on finite uranium—remains a dead end. As other members have mentioned, the strategy ducks the nuclear waste issue.

We look forward to publication of the national transport strategy later this year. However, "Choosing Our Future" does not include the interim targets for road traffic reduction that we had hoped for; it contains nothing stronger than an aspiration to stabilise levels. Will any of the aspirations that are mentioned in the document for better public transport be realised?

This week, again at the Finance Committee, we heard that the Scottish Executive's projected spending this year on rail services and the

integrated transport fund is being revised dramatically downwards and some of the money that will be made available will be spent instead on roads. Hard on the heels of today's debate, it is back to business as usual next week with an Executive debate on the economic benefits of the air routes development fund. Once again, there is a need for the Executive to translate rhetoric into reality.

We welcome the strategy and everything that the Executive lays out in the document. It has shown that it knows what needs to be done, but what matters now are the changes that it will make. Will the rhetoric of the document be matched by the reality of changes to Executive policy?

I move amendment S2M-3792.3 to insert at end:

"and moreover makes it clear that leadership and consistent action from the top of government is of critical importance to enable lasting change; considers the progress so far by the Executive since 1999 to be richer in rhetoric than reality but, nevertheless, a full 13 years since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, welcomes this first step towards a meaningful strategy; considers that sustainable development should be the top priority of government, and recognises the critical role of this Parliament and its structures in engaging fully with the strategy and holding the Executive to account on its delivery."

15:19

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I strongly welcome the publication of "Choosing Our Future". It represents a huge step forward for us in terms of policy development and sets a framework and a vision to guide our future actions.

I share some of the sense that has been expressed around the chamber that we have heard some of the rhetoric before. For the members who have turned up to the annual debate on sustainable development in each of the past six years—which is probably about half the members in the chamber—there is not an awful lot that is new in many of the speeches that we will hear this afternoon. What has changed is that we have in front of us a much more coherent, detailed and crunchy policy development, which we can debate into the future.

It feels as though time is catching up with us, so we should welcome the document. It is interesting that I have received briefings on the topic only from non-governmental organisations that have environmental interests, although perhaps other members' experience is different. A real issue arises about ensuring that the debate is not seen as being simply an environmental one. I will focus most of my comments on the economy, which is the real challenge.

As a country, we use more than our fair share of the world's resources. We are fast running through

our scarce resources such as gas and oil, we are not accountable for the adverse impacts of the use of that energy globally, and our businesses and people still throw out perfectly serviceable materials in everyday life. Our clothes, furniture, computers and electrical goods all have built-in obsolescence, or we just get bored with them. That is not good enough. It damages our environment and communities and creates unattractive polluted areas with severe social justice problems. Such communities are losing out on the general prosperity that most of us enjoy.

We have made a lot of progress in the past six years. Waste is one issue on which the Executive has had the biggest impact but, although 75 per cent of our waste comes from the commercial and industrial sectors, most of our energy has been aimed at domestic waste, so there is a huge amount more still to do. Most of our poorest communities are those that have the worst environments and many of them have to deal with the problems that the rest of us create—other people's pollution is exported to them. We must ensure that our social and economic priorities are absolutely plugged into the debate.

As a country, we are happy to outsource some of the dirtier and more polluting activities. We have international agreements that mean that fair trade becomes much more important, but none of us engages with the real cost of trainers at £20 or a skirt at £10. We need to think about social justice in the UK and Scotland and about global economic prosperity. That is why the motion is absolutely right to put our economy centre stage and why the policy framework is bang on. We must tackle the central issue of greening our economy, which does not just mean creating green jobs in environmentally friendly industries such as renewables—crucial though that is—but is about transforming our economic activities and changing them for the future.

We know that changing our economy has costs. Scotland's economic base was transformed absolutely during the past century and our poorest communities were devastated by some of that sharp economic change. We must make the link with social justice and ensure that when we reduce our carbon emissions by 60 per cent—as we must do over the next few decades—the poorest communities do not lose out again. Our economic strategy must link into social justice and be plugged into the climate-change agenda so that environmental and social justice are at the heart of the measures.

People hate having change imposed on them; none of us likes that, but we will be forced to change in some ways, which is why the core elements of the strategy, which are about transforming our economy so that we have high-

value jobs with lower ecological or environmental impacts and progressively lower carbon emissions, are the most important ones. We must redesign products and make them adaptable with reusable components. We must tap into the great ideas in universities and companies to make better use of our resources. We cannot afford to waste our resources; equally, we cannot afford to waste the world's resources or to make our companies uncompetitive. I totally disagree with Alex Johnstone's comments that we cannot afford to be ahead of the game—we must, for our economic and environmental future, be ahead of the game. Some hard thinking needs to be done on that now.

As individuals, we make choices all the time. We need to enable people to make better and more sustainable choices. That will happen over time. The document contains good ideas about experimenting and seeing what is most effective. There is a really exciting and interesting agenda, but it must be translated into practical policies. People need to know that they are not the only ones who are changing and that other people are, too. We need big collective decisions, so that individuals' decisions have community impacts, which add up to a national impact. The tone of Rob Gibson's speech on that point was so wrong. The issue is not about Scotland having all the tools that a national Parliament would provide; it is about using the tools that we have as effectively as possible and integrating at UK and European levels to ensure that we make as big a difference as possible.

Let us consider some of the small things that we have not done yet. If individual members of the public want to put up simple solar panels on their roofs, we still require them to apply to their local planning department, to wait months and to pay an awful lot of money. That is daft and we could change it tomorrow. We could tell every public sector organisation—which, as Rob Gibson pointed out, represents half of the expenditure in Scotland—that when they save energy and make efficiencies they can recycle that back into the organisation. Some of that work has been started by the Executive, but the question is how we kick that process up to the next level. How do we accelerate the process?

The document provides us with an excellent starting point. A lot has been done over the past six years and "Changing Our Future" pulls it all together, makes it coherent and allows Parliament to start to scrutinise the subject. I would like future debates on sustainable development to be attended not just by members who are interested in the subject. Every policy committee of the Parliament should take the sections of the report, scrutinise them and ask what is happening on their watch. What is happening in the Enterprise and Culture Committee that relates to the document?

What is happening in the Communities Committee? Such scrutiny should not only be carried out by the Environment and Rural Development Committee; it has to be taken on board by the whole Parliament. That is why the chamber needs to be full. All of us know how the whipping system works, but every member attends committees. I suggest that we follow the recommendations in chapters 14, 15 and 16. We should consider the radical ideas on targets and on driving us in a different direction. We should ensure that Parliament criticises the Executive regularly, that it takes responsibility and that it cuts through the rhetoric and the cross-party consensus. Every committee should consider what the Executive is doing and should sign up to some of the tough decisions. Then we will get to choose our own future and achieve a sustainable Scotland; everybody in the chamber would sign up to that. The real challenge is what we do as parliamentarians to make that happen.

15:27

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): We cannot achieve what we need to achieve without the co-operation of the people of Scotland. Ross Finnie calls on all sections of society in Scotland to play their parts in reducing Scotland's global environmental impact. The motion talks about protecting Scotland's

"natural heritage and resources for the long term, improving the quality of life of individuals and communities, and securing environmental justice".

Those are great words and the right ideas, and without doubt that is the direction in which we should be moving with great haste, but words alone will not bring about that change, words alone will not clean up our act on the global stage and words alone will not empower Scotland's citizens. Time is not on our side. If we are truly to bring about the required change we need deeds and we need them now. We need not look far to see the ravages of pollution and poison and their ill effects on our communities. The solution is close at hand if the will exists to bring about that change.

We hear about targets, plans and legislation, but many people in Scotland still live under a cloud of pollution and find themselves excluded from the decision-making process. There has been plenty of development, but much of it has been unsustainable. On the Executive's watch, plans have been drawn up that will increase the number of cars on our roads, decisions have been made that will erode communities' participation in the planning process and deals have been struck that will ensure new and long-lasting pollution for Scotland and therefore for the entire planet. Nonetheless, the Executive has the brass neck to

tell us that there will be environmental justice and, therefore, sustainable development.

What justice has there been for the people of Glasgow, who have to live with the consequences of motorway after motorway being ploughed through communities in built-up areas? Many members will tell us that those superhighways will reduce traffic and, therefore, pollution, but that claim is nonsense. The only thing that will reduce traffic is a reduction in car use. The Executive has stood with its hands in its pockets while poorer communities in built-up areas have coughed their way through polluted air. The people of Pollok have lost a huge chunk of their natural heritage in the shape of Pollok park: a once dear green place is now a congested concrete lump. Dalkeith is in line for the same treatment—the loss of parkland and the introduction of new traffic is of concern to that community, which could have voiced those concerns had it been afforded environmental justice.

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin): Is the member aware of the level of air pollution in Dalkeith town centre? What does she propose to do about it?

Rosie Kane: The minister is aware of the pollution levels. The same pleas were made in relation to the M74 and the M77. We have those pollution levels because too many cars are on the roads. Building roads simply moves those cars to another place and, in the long term, increases traffic and, therefore, pollution. We will be even more aware of pollution in the future, as will people in the area that will be affected.

People have not been afforded environmental justice and they now fight their corner with the odds stacked against them. What about the people of Carmyle, Rutherglen, Toryglen and Cambuslang, who stand on chromium, arsenic and lime? The locations of many such polluted sites in those areas have not been identified because people were not given environmental justice or the resources that they needed to locate and reveal those sites.

I can see that development has taken place, but the Executive cannot claim that it has been sustainable development. The Executive may well pat itself on the back and claim that it is doing well, but the evidence suggests the contrary. In November last year, North Lanarkshire Council was fined £4,000 after admitting to poor management of Auchinlea landfill. The fine will be paid, but the damage has been done and the opportunity to do more such damage still exists. In a separate case, Western Isles Council was fined £2,000 for failing to inspect waste that was being delivered to landfill. The damage has been done and the fine will be paid, but the potential and the

conditions still exist for such breaches to take place.

Sustainable development relies on an empowered and educated society with the resources to make informed decisions, but there is no evidence that that is even on the Executive's radar. In 2003, members of the public in Glasgow made 241 complaints to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency; people in Ayrshire made 210 complaints; people in Dumfries made 282 complaints; in Dumbarton, people made 264 complaints; in Galloway, 173 complaints were made; and in North Lanarkshire, 101 complaints were made. That is a small snapshot, but it shows the high number of complaints.

In 2004, Professor Mark Poustie produced "Environmental Justice in SEPA's Environmental Protection Activities: A Report for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency". It contains 14 lengthy recommendations, which start from page 102. If members have not read that report, I ask them please to do so—a glance at the recommendations shows a huge deficit in environmental justice.

The Executive is in no position to promise environmental justice. Communities have been, are and will be excluded from the equation. Resources and political will are required to change that. No improvements in environmental justice have taken place during the Scottish Parliament's life or since the Rio declaration of 1992. Does the minister know that only 11 procurators fiscal are dedicated to environmental justice? That does not bode well, given the number of complaints that I have outlined and the increase in complaints that we hope to have if we progress environmental justice. Does the minister intend to do something to improve the situation and to allow the process to develop?

The Brundtland declaration of 1987 defines sustainable development as follows:

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Those are words, but we need deeds. I hope that we will have answers to some of the questions and a truly green and clean Scotland.

15:33

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): I cannot match Sarah Boyack's record of being present at every sustainability debate in the Parliament in the past six years so, without wishing to incur her wrath, I am afraid that I will return to themes that I have used in previous sustainability debates. I do that in no way because I do not want to deliver a lively, innovative and fresh speech, but to make the point that a number

of us who are totally committed to a range of the arguments that the Government makes in the Scottish sustainable development strategy are frustrated by the lack of progress in achieving some objectives. I am afraid that the point needs to be restated regularly.

Parliament has moved a great deal in the debate about climate change and associated issues from debating whether climate change is a problem to debating how we tackle the problem and deliver credible solutions. That obviously matters, because the issue will affect all our constituencies in different ways. In my constituency, communities such as Birnam and Dalguise are severely affected by flooding from the River Tay, which is a consequence of climate change. We must take account of that problem and take measures to tackle it.

That brings me to the issue of the degree of action that has been taken by the Government to address the problem. I will use three examples to highlight my concern that the Government is not delivering at a pace that is consistent with the objectives and aspirations that are set out in the Scottish sustainability strategy.

First, I will raise the issue of the strategic waste fund, about which I questioned the minister earlier. One of the local authorities whose area I represent part of—Perth and Kinross Council—has a commendable record of achievement on recycling. That is much to do with the innovative work that was undertaken by Bruce Crawford when, as a much younger, leaner and fitter man, he was the convener of environmental services in the council in the late 1980s. As a result of the decisions that he and his colleagues took, the council has made tremendous progress in achieving commendable rates of recycling. It has gone through all the easy wins that many areas are going through in their recycling strategies and now needs to be actively supported in establishing the investment and infrastructure that can ensure that it can achieve even higher rates of recycling. That requires funding support through the strategic waste fund. The council is required to make a bid for phase 2 funding by 31 January and the Scottish Executive has indicated that that bid will be considered by the winter of 2006. I cannot believe that the Executive needs 11 months to evaluate a bid to the strategic waste fund.

Why does that matter? It matters for two reasons: first, because the council wants to support the Government's strategy and deliver this type of improvement in the level of recycling; and, secondly, because if the council does not have the infrastructure in place, it will start to get fined under the landfill allowances scheme. The council estimates that, in 2006-07, if its current level of landfill depositing continues, it might be fined

around £215,000, rising to £563,000 in subsequent financial years. I make a plea to the minister to ensure that the Government shortens the timetable for considering those bids so that we can have some good news on this issue in Perth and Kinross.

Ross Finnie: I have no absolute knowledge about the situation in Perth and Kinross. However, setting a general date by which all phase 2 bids will be taken might be rather different from specifically saying that the consideration of any individual bid will necessarily take 11 months. In any case, I am sure that the member is not suggesting that, in parting with what will be quite considerable funds, the Government does not have a duty to be satisfied that the bids meet all the relevant criteria. Further, on the juxtaposition of the giving of those approvals and the imposition of the landfill allowance scheme, ministers still have discretion as to the play between those two elements.

Mr Swinney: That latter point is a helpful point of clarification that I am sure the council will appreciate.

On the first point, however, I hope that it does not take 11 months for the Government to evaluate every bid. I cannot believe that even the greatest amount of scrutiny of any bid takes 11 months. I make a plea for the shortening of the timetable in that regard.

My sense of optimism on this issue was not enhanced when I considered the revised budget estimates that the Finance Committee examined on Tuesday, which showed, in the current financial year, a transfer out of the strategic waste fund of £29.93 million. That causes me enormous concern about the possibility that the Government is not delivering as quickly as it said that it would.

The second concern that I want to raise relates to the move to renewable energy. I am a firm supporter of renewable energy. However, there is concern, which I know that the minister acknowledges, about the guidelines on onshore wind farm developments. I draw the minister's attention to a document called "North Sea Oil and Gas: Coastal Planning Guidelines", which came into my possession just before the Christmas recess. It was published by the Scottish Office in 1974 and gives a spatial strategy as to where oil-related development was permissible in the country. I hope that the Scottish Executive will produce a similar set of guidelines for renewable energy, because that will give local authorities the sort of guidance, support and clarity that they are crying out for. If such guidelines could be produced in that halcyon year of 1974—when the Scottish National Party did spectacularly well in the general elections—I am sure that it can be done again in 2006.

I hope that the pace of activity on this issue can be improved and that that improvement will include ensuring that the Government gets its act together to ensure that Breadalbane Academy gets its wood-fuel heating system. If the minister makes progress on the three issues that I have mentioned, I promise not to deliver the same speech again in 12 months' time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I ask members to stick to speeches of six minutes. Otherwise, we will lose some back-bench members from the debate.

15:40

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I congratulate the Executive on the publication of "Choosing Our Future". In my view, it is the most important document that the Executive has published because it is the blueprint for our aspirations for a sustainable future. I note the welcome that the environmental non-governmental organisations have given the document. Those organisations, like all of us—even Alex Fergusson, bless him—want the strategy to be translated into action. [*Interruption.*] Sorry, I mean Alex Johnstone. I hope that Alex Fergusson will welcome the document too. I note that he is shaking his head.

I would have been alarmed if the environmental NGOs had not welcomed the document and given us their thoughts on the priorities—after all, they are the usual suspects. However, I find it disappointing that it is only the environmental NGOs that have e-mailed their welcome and their comments to MSPs. The strategy affects all sectors in Scotland. Where is the endorsement from the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the oil companies, the housebuilders, the transport operators, the National Farmers Union, the fishermen's organisations or our universities? I know that some of those bodies are striving positively to address the challenges of climate change, waste disposal or local food production, even if they are doing so out of enlightened self-interest—I think of the television adverts from BP that stress the company's green credentials. However, others perceive the challenges only in negative terms. We must persuade them of the value of change—not only the environmental value but the financial rewards and economic benefits that come from waste minimisation or energy efficiency.

Towards the end of the document, there is a chapter on what households and businesses can do. It covers the choices that they can make, the impact that those choices will have and how people can be supported. It states that individuals and households are supported by the new

recycling facilities that are in place, by better public transport, by safe paths to walk and cycle and by more energy-efficient buildings and products. Businesses are supported by the implementation of the green jobs strategy and by support from organisations such as WRAP, the Energy Saving Trust, Envirowise and others. I urge communities and businesses to take advantage of that support and I urge those who are already doing so to bring peer pressure to bear on their friends and on other businesses and communities. If they do so, we will make progress.

My particular interest is in renewables. I believe that the development of renewables in the Highlands and Islands presents a unique opportunity for communities to prosper through small wind farm and biomass projects or hydrogen production. There is increasing scope for jobs to come to the Highlands and Islands in connection with the larger offshore and onshore wind farm projects and future marine renewable projects. The silent majority that is in favour of wind farms and the upgrading of the grid needs to speak out against some of the dafter assertions of some of the dafter anti-wind farm and anti-pylon lobbyists. I welcome the imminent acquisition of the Nigg yard by the Cromarty Firth Port Authority. I hope that the stability that that will give the facilities means that we can look forward to more engineering work for the renewables sector coming to Ross-shire.

At the other end of the scale, Sarah Boyack has lodged a proposal for a member's bill to promote micro-renewables at the household level. I ask the Executive to consider whether the use of micro-renewables could become part of the central heating programme for pensioners. Recently, the Minister for Communities visited the 40,000th private house to have central heating installed under the scheme and he announced the revision and continuation of the programme. If the Executive was seen to use micro-renewables—and, indeed, if it was able to lower the price for other customers through bulk procurement—that would be a huge endorsement. The domestic renewables industry is in a chicken-and-egg situation. It needs to grow its order book so that it can bring down its unit cost and be competitive with oil and gas systems.

The minister will recall my interest in the marine environment. I am pleased to endorse the paragraphs in "Choosing Our Future" that cover the marine strategy. I welcome the minister's comments on the possibility of legislation in conjunction with the UK Government and I welcome the Executive's commitment to a marine national park. I emphasise, as others have done, that we need spatial planning in the marine environment. I suppose that I should declare an interest as a member of the Moray firth partnership strategy group.

I would like to end—this is a nice short speech, Presiding Officer—by endorsing what the document says about Scotland in the global context. If we endorse the make poverty history campaign, in all conscience we cannot continue to use more than our fair share of the world's resources or contribute more than our fair share of carbon emissions. Government, communities and business must all work together on this. Tomorrow, I confidently expect to find my e-mail inbox full of pledges from COSLA, the universities, the NFU, the fishermen's organisations, the CBI and the FSB saying that they will work hand in glove with the Executive to achieve the sustainability goals that we seek.

15:45

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I have read the report and listened to the debate thus far with great interest. I take my cue from Sarah Boyack's speech in particular. She drew our attention to the interconnectedness of all that is being said and the fact that there are ramifications for each parliamentary committee.

It will come as no surprise to ministers that I want to use the magnifying glass of my remote and far-flung constituency to consider some of those ramifications. I will give two examples of where we should think more cleverly than we have done thus far. The report's sentiments and the targets that it sets are laudable and I hear support for them from all sides of the chamber. My two examples arise from discussions that Maureen Macmillan, Rob Gibson and I had with representatives of the Highland Council.

I have lived all my life in the Highlands, in which time industries have come and gone. Maureen Macmillan referred to the Nigg yard; the work that has been done there is great but, sadly, construction in the oil industry will never be what it was. Again in my own lifetime, I remember the advent and sad disappearance of the British Aluminium smelter at Invergordon. However, it is recognised by all that the tourism industry is the one industry that has the potential for long-term sustainability, particularly as it is based on culture, history and archaeology, which are assets that are not in short supply in the Highlands, especially the northern Highlands. That said, the Highland Council stated today that although we have a product that we can currently offer and develop further, there is a problem in getting people into and out of the Highlands, particularly the northern Highlands, at an affordable price. I would like to quote from an interview with Councillor David Flear in the *John O'Groat Journal* of 23 December. The councillor is known to Highland members because he is the Caithness area convener. He

makes the point that Wick airport could do with a public service obligation that is similar to those of other airports, particularly those in the islands. He says:

"It costs the same to go to the Continent from central Scotland as it costs to go from Wick to Aberdeen, which is a 20-minute flight. A public service obligation on all these services would help reduce the cost and might also enable us to increase the frequencies and perhaps to introduce new services."

That point is well made. Of course, it behoves back-bench members to come to ministers with shopping lists. I do not expect either minister to respond to that point, but it cross-cuts into Tavish Scott's department. If we are to sustain the economy in the far north, we must think about what departments such as the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department can offer.

The Highland Council also raised my second point. I will give the very specific and remote example of the Assynt centre, which is a small centre for old people in the village of Lochinver in north-west Sutherland. The centre provides three beds: one respite, and two that have other uses for the elderly. It costs some £300,000 per annum to run the centre and it is threatened with closure. The council has made the point that it simply does not have that funding, because it is having to make cutbacks. Rob Gibson heard our esteemed councillors make the same comments.

It is tempting for a council such as Highland to hit a smaller rather than a bigger unit. It is easier to do that than take £300,000 off a unit in a conurbation or centre of population where the effect could be greater. I am sure that that will not be the Highland councillors' motive, but that nevertheless demonstrates that there is a money shortage. Again, that sounds like a shopping list. However, discussions are on-going at COSLA to see whether Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council can get the same deal as the islands councils, which receive a special islands needs allowance. That could be considered for those two councils.

I see a wry smile on your face, Presiding Officer. My point is that sustainability is not only about employment and the economy—it is also about keeping small communities alive and flourishing. To keep them alive and flourishing, we must provide for old people as well as for young people.

I do not expect ministers to come back with answers to the points that I have made. However, I ask them please to remember that although the aspects of sustainability that I have mentioned do not necessarily meet the eye, they are relevant, particularly in the context of the wider concept of sustainability.

15:50

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I begin by drawing members' attention to my entry in the register of interests. I support what Alex Johnstone has said and welcome what the minister said about regeneration and environmental justice. The Executive's aims are laudable and supportable, but one must ask whether they are being met, whether they are working and whether things are moving fast enough.

Essentially, the Scottish Conservatives seek to achieve not only a sustainable development strategy but a sustainable society. At the moment, that aim is not being achieved. Parts of society are certainly enjoying a better standard of living and a better, sustainable quality of life, but too many Scots, including too many of my constituents in Ayrshire, are not doing so. Scotland is still hugely divided by poverty and inequality and the gaps are widening rather than closing. That is happening nowhere more so than in Ayr. Life expectancy for men in north Ayr is six years less than it is for those who live on the south side of the River Ayr. That bald statistic says it all. As a short, fat and bald man who lives in north Ayr, the matter is close to my heart.

The problem that the Executive must address is highlighted if we consider the statistics more closely. Life expectancy is the end result of our society's success or failure in managing and producing acceptable outcomes for our constituents. That result is derived from a variety of social and environmental justice factors. The success or failure of our education policy, for example, can be judged from the fact that 13 per cent of our young people who are aged between 16 to 19 are not in education, employment or training. That situation is not sustainable. As the minister said, the cost to the Scottish economy each year as a result of energy wastage is £1.3 billion. In a world that is ever-more energy conscious, such a situation is less sustainable by the day. The cost of energy loss from housing is similarly high.

I say to the minister that differential life expectancies, educational and employment disparities and energy loss are just a few examples that can be given. Many more examples are available that relate to transport, health, green spaces and diet. The crushing fact is that the bad end of the statistics always applies to the poorest and least well-off in our society. Poor housing impacts on my most deprived constituents. Poor transport affects them most in accessing hospital. The situation is about to get worse if our accident and emergency unit at Ayr hospital is lost. Poor standards of academic achievement and high unemployment are worst in our social inclusion partnership or regeneration area. We are all

familiar with the issues, but they are still not being resolved, despite the Government's best efforts.

I say to the minister that where we are at the moment with social and environmental justice in their broadest senses is not sustainable—Sarah Boyack alluded to that. We must do better. Diet is a vital factor for life expectancy and healthy, sustainable lifestyles and it is an area that we can address. My farming co-operative and food retailing experience and connections lead me to believe that we could do better in that area. Essentially, we must produce more local food for local people. Many raw ingredients for a balanced and healthy diet are available to us from our farms in Scotland, but the diet of our population is poor. That there are high levels of avoidable illness is a regrettable fact.

We must build on the vision for food procurement that Andy Kerr set out in May 2004 and encourage better eating habits and greater consumption of local food. We must create an agency or extend the role of existing bodies to create a Scottish network so that we get more local food to local people. In the public sector, local authorities, hospitals and prisons must use more Scottish food that is supplied by major Scottish companies. Our catering and restaurant trades need to buy more Scottish food wherever possible from local suppliers, as we in the Parliament do. Doing so will produce major benefits for our health and for our tourism industry. Local food is fresher and tastier, has higher vitamin levels and lasts longer. Its purchase results in savings on food miles and creates local employment. Local food that is prepared by local restaurants is likely to produce a better eating experience for the £900 million food tourism market in Scotland as well as supporting our farmers.

In doing all that, we create a genuine sustainable win-win situation for consumers who, through eating better food, have a better lifestyle and longer life expectancy. The Scottish economy also benefits from an improved tourism product and jobs are sustained and created in the food production and farming sectors.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

John Scott: Sorry, but I am just about to close.

I urge the Parliament to support our amendment, and I hope that the Executive has more success in the future than it has had in the past in delivering a sustainable development strategy.

15:55

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): When John Swinney was lauding the role of

Bruce Crawford in improving waste disposal in Perth and Kinross, I was reminded of Churchill's comment about Chamberlain—that he viewed the world

“through the wrong end of a municipal drainpipe.”

We need to get out of the parochial and into the more global and broader sense of what we want to achieve. There is a sense in which there has been too much consensus in the debate that we are having today. If we want to make a difference and take sustainable development seriously, some difficult and not necessarily straightforward choices need to be made.

In my intervention on Rob Gibson I made the point that there is a debate to be had about nuclear power. I am not wedded to the idea of nuclear power, but I am not fundamentally opposed to it either. There is a scientific debate to be had about the advantages and disadvantages of nuclear power and carbon-burning power and a debate to be had about the global as well as the financial implications. If that debate is not had in a sensible, systematic and scientifically informed way, we will do a disservice to the people of Scotland. I am not saying which direction that debate should take, but we have to go beyond denial and recognise that what is corrupting this world is the extent of carbon burning at the present time and the implications for future carbon burning of the rate of economic development of places such as China and India, which will impact not just on us but on many parts of sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere. Those are issues that we have to address.

Mark Ballard: In the interest of being more global and less parochial, has Des McNulty considered that if we are to replace carbon dioxide-producing fossil fuels at a global level, finite supplies of uranium can never be a global solution to world energy needs and that only renewables will provide a global solution?

Des McNulty: Renewables have to be very much part of the solution. Nevertheless, I remind Mark Ballard that supplies of uranium will last significantly longer than supplies of oil or coal, at present depletion levels. We must think about the balance over time.

We agree in the chamber about fishing—well, some of us disagree: the Greens and I form an alliance on the issue. Looking at the global evidence, I do not believe that the current level of take from the seas is remotely sustainable. We plunder the science and say that there is a scientific argument for everything except when it contradicts our own interest. Every scientific study of fishing levels in the North sea and in other seas throughout the world—look at what happened to the Grand banks fisheries in Canada—suggests

that present rates of depletion and activity in relation to our take from the marine environment here and globally are not sustainable. We can argue about sustainable development in theoretical terms, but if we walk away from dealing with it when it comes to a practical proposition that affects us, we are deluding ourselves.

It is not that I think that it is all necessarily one way. I will pick an argument in which the Greens and I might disagree. I think that there is a balance to be struck between public and private transport. In terms of economic development and growth, it is not a viable strategy for Scotland to be anti-car—I just do not think that that makes sense. There has to be some kind of balance between public and private transport. We need to think and argue systematically about that.

Mr Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Des McNulty: I am reluctant to give way because there is a lack of balance in the chamber at present.

There is an issue with a transport strategy that is in favour of dealing with the immediate and pressing congestion problems in west central Scotland, for example. I would argue that the M74 extension is necessary and highly desirable because the consequences of not going ahead with that would be fundamentally bad for our economy and would cause all kinds of other problems. At the same time, people are prepared to argue for the Borders railway, which would have a low level of usage and would not have any significant economic benefit.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): The member is in his final minute.

Des McNulty: We need to think seriously about how to bring together environmental and economic benefits in a rational and scientific way that will use real indicators. Those indicators have to bring together economic and realistic environmental indicators. I am not convinced that the ecological footprint is the best way to do that; it would be far better to talk about energy use and to begin to build a sensible model around that.

These issues have to be taken seriously and, to be blunt, if we are going to move in the direction of sustainable development, hard choices will have to be made. There will be losers in that process. We will have to take a step back from our current level of economic development and energy use and that debate will have to be taken seriously. It will be controversial and I am disturbed by the fact that the debate is far too consensual.

16:02

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): The Executive has produced an excellent document; it has pretty pictures and some quite sensible text. We have had a good debate because there is a great deal of consensus about the direction in which we want to go. The words are fine. Sarah Boyack made an exceptionally good speech, much of which I agree with.

The Parliament and Executive must examine what is being delivered—the reality behind the rhetoric. I will take transport schemes as an example. If someone dreams up a railway scheme or a scheme where a tram replaces a bus, that is good and we must support it. However, it must be demonstrated that that investment will create an improvement. For example, if we could persuade the English to join in, a really good fast train between central Scotland and London would do a huge amount of good and would reduce the number of people who fly. There was also a suggestion that there should be a really fast train between Edinburgh and Glasgow. Whether that will deliver an improvement needs to be carefully examined; we do not want to leave out the communities in central Scotland that are served by the present train. We must examine reality carefully.

I am very keen on the mini power schemes, as is Sarah Boyack. The document mentions a primary school in Erskine—St John Bosco—that has put up its own little windmill. Why should not every school have a windmill? Why should not the Parliament building have 100 windmills or lots of solar panels? Many public buildings could generate a lot of power for wider communities, not just for themselves. We could specify that every public-private partnership school must have a decent environmental, power-generating scheme built into it. We could improve the planning arrangements for solar panels and little windmills in houses, for example. We should consider how we will deliver in practice and how we will ensure that what we are investing in delivers some improvements.

Sometimes, bodies such as the NGOs come out with great statements—usually they are against something—that are based on complete misapprehension and bad science. We must scrutinise what people are saying and not just go for hot air and nice, cuddly, warm phrases.

The same applies to recycling, which is a good thing. I laboriously put out a red box or blue box on alternate weeks, but I have a grave suspicion that it all goes into one big hole somewhere. We need to do a bit of detective work to examine whether recycling actually works and whether it delivers what it is supposed to deliver.

Above all, we must make better use of planning to ensure that sustainability is considered on a wider front. Sustainable communities must have human and social sustainability. The environment is part of the issue, but there is a lot more to it. We want to create communities in which it is a pleasure to live and work. For example, we need to bring work to the people rather than have everyone get in a motor car to travel a distance to work. We need to consider how communities can be sustainable. The Planning etc (Scotland) Bill could have much more on that sort of issue. If human and environmental sustainability was written in capital letters in local development plans, we could use that as a stick with which to compel things to happen.

We could even make individuals more sustainable. I had a long discussion with a gentleman today about how, if physical education was more directed towards teaching people to move correctly, our bodies and our brains—that would benefit some of us—would work much better. In considering human sustainability, we need to consider both individual and community sustainability.

Above all, we could liberate the energies of communities. I have a great belief that many people in communities could make a much greater contribution than they are allowed to do at the moment. Community councils could perhaps be given powers to set up little local power generation schemes and other environmental schemes on, for example, recycling. We already have many good voluntary schemes, but there could be many more. However, page 1 of the Executive's recent document on community councils states simply that community councils will not be given any more powers. The many other pages simply ask, "Do you want to have no powers in this way or that?"

We need to harness our communities. If they can create sustainable communities, we can create a sustainable society and Scotland can then make its contribution. The sustainable development strategy is a good start, but we as a Parliament must get stuck in and ensure that things actually happen.

16:07

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): The SNP amendment welcomes the sustainable development strategy and supports its vision, but we ask that achievable targets be set so that individuals, businesses, local authorities and communities play their part in reducing Scotland's global footprint.

Other members have commented on the need to take tough decisions, such as the hard choices to

which Des McNulty referred. Although it is true that a sustainable development strategy must be led from the top by example and encouragement, it is sometimes necessary to offer the stick rather than the carrot if we are to ensure that things really happen.

I believe that the minister and the Executive have a genuine commitment to sustainable development, but I have concerns about the timidity that is inherent in "Choosing Our Future". For example, page 8 states:

"We hope these will inspire others to follow suit."

That is fine, but we need action. In the section on procurement on page 80, the document states:

"The Executive needs to show leadership".

I agree, but is that a tacit admission that the Executive has not shown leadership already? If such leadership results in no moves forward, what will the Executive do? Hope, inspiration and showing leadership are good things, but they may not be enough to achieve the required changes.

Despite the absence of targets and detailed steps on how those will be achieved, the strategy document gives an important role to the voluntary sector. A plethora of organisations are mentioned:

"The Executive will work closely with the Sustainable Scotland Network, Scottish Sustainable Development Forum, Sustainable Development Commission, Forward Scotland and other key stakeholders".

I am also aware that the sus it out programme was recently announced at a presentation at Edinburgh castle and that funding is being provided to help civic society to move forward and become engaged with the issue. I am concerned about the lack of a single, coherent voice on this matter, although that concern, which is not just for this minister's department, might be for another day.

For some time, I have been concerned that voluntary organisations are becoming so entangled in delivering on Government plans that, instead of Government standing up and being firm about what must happen, those organisations increasingly appear to be little more than one of its arms, delivering services. I look for reassurance that Scotland's voluntary organisations are not being asked to deliver on the Executive's environmental targets. For example, is there a requirement on local authorities to engage with the sus it out campaign? What kind of clout does the campaign have? Does the Executive back what it is trying to achieve?

I am interested in what the strategy has to say about both housing and public buildings. The issue has been discussed before; indeed, the document cites the very good example of the Slateford Green project in Edinburgh, which was built for a housing association and shows what can be

achieved. Moreover, excellent long-standing projects in Shettleston and Easterhouse in Glasgow are heated by communal wood-burning facilities. We should move in that direction.

However, the public sector and other sectors are not doing enough to develop real sustainable housing. By that, I am not simply referring to the eco-housing model; I am talking about smaller projects. For example, housing stock transfer organisations have ordered thousands of sets of uPVC windows. What is wrong with wood? It is more sustainable, and brings us back to the potential for local delivery and employment and the green economy. We should take such matters more into account.

Alex Johnstone said that initial capital cost was an issue for affordable housing. However, why should capital cost be an issue only for people who cannot afford to buy their own homes or who choose to rent from housing associations, councils or other public sector bodies? The secret is to consider the whole life of these houses. After all, best value is not just a matter of unit cost; as I have said, the whole-life aspects of these buildings must be taken into consideration. I have cited the example of Scandinavia before, and we should examine how those countries deal with and cost their housing. We should not simply think about how much we can achieve—

Alex Johnstone: Does the member accept my concern that upfront costs might be preventing required housing standards from being achieved? I simply suggested that Government might have to intervene to ensure that upfront costs are deferred over the whole life of these projects.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute, Ms Fabiani.

Linda Fabiani: Alex Johnstone has raised a particular issue. However, from my experience in housing development, I know that the claim that such projects have higher upfront capital costs is often no more than rhetoric. That is where the Government must lead by saying, "No—we want these standards to be achieved" and using the stick as well as the carrot. However, we can always begin with the public housing sector, which receives public funds. After all, we cannot exactly force private housing developers to use sustainable materials if housing associations of whatever hue are themselves using non-sustainable materials. We have to look at the whole picture.

I have not left myself an awful lot of time to moan about some of the ridiculous public buildings that are being built, but Robin Harper referred to some earlier. As studies have shown, public finance initiative schemes for hospitals and schools are not sustainable, despite all the rhetoric

about how the materials can be reused if there is sensitive deconstruction. That is not always the case. *[Interruption.]*

It looks as though I am going to have to finish.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are.

Linda Fabiani: Right. Well, I will finish by mentioning again—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, please do not mention anything again. We are very short of time.

Linda Fabiani: We could achieve an awful lot more if the Parliament had the powers. I urge everyone to support the SNP amendment.

16:14

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): No one in their right minds—or even in their wrong minds—would argue against the general principles set out in the motion that we debate this afternoon. Indeed, it is noticeable that none of the amendments seeks to do so. However, it is equally noticeable that two amendments refer to the “vision”, “aspiration” and “rhetoric” that have so dominated the first six and a half years of this Government’s performance at the expense of any meaningful action to introduce the sustainable development that we all seek. Let us fervently hope that, in the spirit of a new year, that is about to change with the acceptance of the strategy this afternoon.

I share some of John Swinney’s concerns about the timescale for action that we have witnessed in past years. Like him, I need look only at my constituency for several examples of how that inactivity has held up investment and entrepreneurship and has dampened economic expansion in a way that should be an embarrassment. There is no finer example of that than in aquaculture—specifically in shellfish—along the Solway coast, where there is the potential for a massive sustainable industry.

Previous overfishing and free-for-all harvesting, which existed under Governments of all shades, led to a depletion of cockle stocks to the extent that it necessitated temporary closure of the beds. They recovered magnificently and—with the very best of intentions, I believe—the Executive set up the Solway Shellfish Management Association in typical style, involving a myriad stakeholders and a great deal of bureaucracy, in order to establish a workable and sustainable licensing regime. Over the past four years or so, however, that organisation has become so bogged down in internal conflicts of interest—as well as in the bureaucracy to which I have referred, which this Executive has always promised but spectacularly failed to reduce—that the project appears to have hit something of a brick wall.

The principal reason for that may be that the one vital cog in the wheel was not brought into the debate until almost the last minute. That cog is the private owner—the individual, the entrepreneur—who owns the sea bed and holds the key to developing the asset sustainably, with a potentially massive jobs benefit in a region that desperately needs one. I am fully aware that the two words “private” and “ownership”, especially when they are joined up, are not terribly welcome in the realms of Executive policy making, but unless the private owners along the Solway are released from the bureaucratic stranglehold under which they currently appear to be held by the Executive, that sustainable development with all its potential will remain—rather literally, in this case—dead in the water.

As the minister is aware, a constituent of mine applied for a several order last February, almost a year ago, in order to begin the process of putting considerable investment into aquaculture in that area, but he has yet to receive anything other than an acknowledgement. A report from a local inquiry into the SSMA proposals appears to be being sat on, and in the meantime the level of illegal cockle harvesting continues to rise, using up the valuable resources of the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency, which I am sure could be better employed elsewhere. I am sure that the minister would agree that the Solway coast is the very epitome of sustainable economic development waiting to happen, and I plead with him to take radical action this year to help that development to happen. He will have my entire support if that can be progressed.

On a different topic, last Saturday morning I attended a public meeting in the village of Springholm in my constituency, where there is considerable unrest over a proposed housing development that will virtually double the size of that small community. I do not pretend that we do not desperately need new housing in Dumfries and Galloway, for purchase and also particularly for rent, but I share some of the concerns raised by the residents of that village at that meeting. It seems that one of the principal reasons behind the development proposal is that the developers believe that they can get permission from Scottish Water to build there. The same is true of other proposals in the constituency.

The inevitable result of that is that people end up building houses where they can get permission to build them rather than where they are most needed, and the result of that is simply to increase car journeys—and I emphasise that, because we will never replace the car in rural Scotland—by a massive amount as more and more people have to commute to their work. As the occupants of those new housing developments tend to be commuters, the very communities that have those

developments thrust upon them can suffer an adverse knock-on effect. Springholm has just had a phase of expansion completed, and as one of the Springholm residents told me on Saturday, "We need time to absorb the first expansion into our community before we have to take on yet another increase." Communities need to be sustainable as well, and that does not necessarily just mean that they need more and more people in them.

Given the time restrictions, I finish by saying that this has been a good debate. It is an annual debate and it is always a good one, on a very worthy subject. I have little argument with either the strategy or the general principles that lie behind it, but I do not have a lot of faith in the ability of this Executive to deliver it.

16:20

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I agree with Alex Fergusson that this has been a good debate. It has been fairly wide ranging, as it has dealt with issues about climate change that are of international importance, as well as a number of more parochial issues that nevertheless need to be addressed.

I would like to underline two or three issues. First, the dereliction of land has not been mentioned, but for many people—particularly in urban communities—that is extremely important. The Executive could take firm and dynamic action to deal with the problem of derelict land, especially in our bigger cities and particularly in the Glasgow and Lanarkshire areas.

More derelict land comes on to the market in Glasgow every year than is refurbished and regenerated and it has so far been a lost opportunity. If we tackle the problem effectively, not only will it benefit the environment in which people live, it will also free up more land for housing and mean that we do not need to encroach on the green belt. It also brings people together into local communities within our urban areas.

Mark Ballard: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: I will make one more point before I take the intervention.

I hope that the Burt committee, which is looking into the future of local government finance, will consider seriously the option of introducing a land value tax, which I believe would make a major contribution both to land reclamation and to economic growth.

I will now take Mark Ballard's intervention.

Mark Ballard: Alex Neil has stolen my intervention. Is he aware of the influence that land

value taxation has had in places such as Pennsylvania, where it has contributed massively to the regeneration of deprived urban communities such as Harrisburg?

Alex Neil: Absolutely. Mark Ballard will be glad to know that it has also contributed enormously to economic growth in that area, as it has brought jobs and development. That is what we all want.

The second issue that I will raise is a parochial, but nevertheless important one, which I believe is a litmus test of how serious the Executive is across all departments about the environment. The issue is the future of Greengairs and the surrounding area in Lanarkshire. Of all the environmental blights in Scotland, Greengairs—it is not entirely the fault of the Executive—is a good example of a place where the environment has been neglected. Within a radius of 3 miles of that small village there are nine landfill and opencast mining sites. That is a disgrace. It is not a case only of ensuring that there are no more such developments in and around Greengairs; positive remedial action is required from the Executive to deal with the after-effects of the poor environmental decisions that have been taken.

Since I am about to run out of time, I will make my final point. I agree with Des McNulty. We should have an adult debate about the future of nuclear power, but one major fact that has been ignored by the proponents of nuclear power up until now is the threat from terrorism. If a terrorist blows up a coal mine or some other installation they might kill a few people, but if they blow up a nuclear power station they could kill a nation.

16:24

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): We started with a shocking but bold admission from the Scottish Executive that if the rest of the world used the same amount of resources as we do in Scotland we would need another two planets. It is worth reflecting on what that means. In any meaningful therapy session it is important for people to admit that they have a problem to start with and then work out what they will do to solve the problem. Well done to the Executive for admitting that we are living completely unsustainably in Scotland today.

The sustainable development strategy provides a good starting point. I would like to run through the four themes that are outlined on page 7 of the strategy and reflect on some of the contributions that we heard this afternoon.

The first theme is the well-being of Scotland's people. It is important that the Executive is working on well-being indicators. It is clear that gross domestic product—blind GDP growth—is not a good indicator of our well-being in Scotland.

Jack McConnell talks about Scotland being the best small country. When I come into Waverley station I see a big poster saying, "Scotland, best small country in the world". That is not necessarily about GDP growth; it is about sustainable development, a healthy economy, a healthy society and a healthy environment. Since being the best small country in the world is about sustainable development, why do we not put it at the heart of Government thinking? Why do we not make it the top line? I hope that we can move towards that goal.

Des McNulty talked about some of the hard choices that we need to make in order to deliver well-being for Scotland. Congestion is a difficult problem on which we need to make hard choices. We are debating sustainable development, but I am sure that, in a few weeks' time, we will have members' debates calling for the upgrading or dualling of roads or the building of more bridges. Scotland does not have the public finances to build all those projects, so hard choices will have to be made about whether we want to invest in major public transport infrastructure or major private transport infrastructure if we want to build more roads.

The second theme in the strategy is supporting thriving communities, and we heard some great contributions on that. Alex Fergusson, Donald Gorrie, Jamie Stone and John Scott all talked about the absolute importance of the community. I was struck recently by how our town centres in Scotland are starting to degenerate economically. They are degenerating partly because of the rise of out-of-town shopping developments. Those developments are leading to increased car use and are opening the gate to more housing developments in the green belt, which forces people to travel even further. That makes it difficult for people to get back into the town centres, which leads to more economic degeneration. We are trapped in a vicious, unsustainable cycle that lowers well-being, increases our resource use, and ruins the economic growth of our small businesses. We need sustainable development to be a centrepiece of the planning system, and we need to make sure that communities' needs—and business is part of the community—are respected. Alex Neil talked about land value taxation, which can play a key role in regenerating our communities. That is an important theme.

The third theme in the sustainable development strategy is protecting Scotland's natural heritage and resources. I was pleased to hear the minister talk more warmly about a single marine act. We do not yet have a commitment, but something could be done in the third session of the Scottish Parliament to break through our guddle of legislation. Perhaps there is no better example of why we need a marine act than the current

regulatory fiasco over ship-to-ship oil transfer in the Firth of Forth. Apparently, the environment there seems to be nobody's responsibility. Let us sort this out. Let us get the right legal basis to protect our marine environment.

I agree with Des McNulty that we cannot pull out of the common fisheries policy. To do so would be madness. For the long-term financial and economic sustainability of our fishing communities we have to remain in the CFP; we have to work with it and reform it from within.

The fourth theme in the strategy is Scotland's global contribution. There is a real test here, as climate change is the biggest threat facing humanity. Establishing sectoral targets is important, and it was a recommendation that the Environment and Rural Development Committee made as part of its climate change inquiry. The committee also recommended that we work towards a national target. It is important that all sectors and all parts of our society pull together and that Scotland shows a fantastic example to the rest of the world of how we move towards a low-carbon economy.

We look to the minister to provide a national target. If he does not, the danger is that sectors such as aviation will pull down our progress and our sustainable development. A couple of months ago, we heard from the Tyndall centre for climate change research that if we allow the aviation sector to continue at the current rate of growth, all other sectors of society will have to reduce their emissions to zero.

Is the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning going to say to businesses that they must reduce all their emissions to zero because aviation is not pulling its weight? Can we expect the public sector to reduce all its emissions to zero? Of course not. That means that we must ensure both that those sectors that exploit other sectors are brought to task and that we make steady reductions in our CO₂ emissions.

The key element of the Executive's document is about making sustainable development happen. The strategy must be the top line of all departments and we must ensure that civil service teams take it seriously. As Sarah Boyack mentioned and as the Green amendment points out, the Parliament has a key role to play in scrutinising the quarterly reports that will be produced. The strategy is a good starting point, but it is only the start of the debate. There must be more scrutiny by the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Nora Radcliffe to close for the Liberal Democrats. You have six minutes.

Bruce Crawford: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will take it out of your speaking time, Mr Crawford, but fire away.

Bruce Crawford: That is not usual for points of order.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have to take the time from somewhere.

Bruce Crawford: It is a serious point of order. Mark Ruskell has closed for the Greens on their amendment. Is it right that a Liberal will now give a closing speech, even though the Liberals do not have an amendment? Should the Liberal member not have been taken first?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will reflect on that, but as the speaking order is determined by the fact that I have already called Mr Ruskell, I cannot change things. The issue is entirely academic.

16:31

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I think everyone welcomes the fact that the sustainable development strategy has now been produced. I want to comment on the aptness of its title, "Choosing Our Future". Each of the words in that phrase carries a lot of weight; it is a very good summation of what sustainable development is all about.

This afternoon's debate has been wide ranging. There has been consensus on the strategy and a great deal of support for it. I endorse much of what has been said, but I apologise in advance because, in summing up what others have said, I will be a bit of a nit-picker.

I will start with Rob Gibson. Sustainable development will not be achieved unless everyone makes a contribution to it. Full powers are not a prerequisite for guaranteeing a sustainable Scotland. There is more than enough for us to do with the powers that we already have and work can be done in the context of the United Kingdom by the Westminster Government. I remind Rob Gibson that we have representation in that Government. To be a bit more positive, he was right to talk about information being necessary to enable individuals, organisations and communities to make their contribution.

I fully endorse Alex Johnstone's remark that we now have a foundation to build on and that it is important that we do that. However, there is no way to avoid our making a disproportionate contribution to reducing emissions. That is inevitable—we are using a disproportionate share of resources, ergo we will have to make a disproportionate contribution to correct that imbalance. Sarah Boyack put the counter-argument to Alex Johnstone's timidity about our businesses taking the lead better than I could, so I will let her have the last word on that.

Mark Ballard talked about the debate having moved on, but he continued to make the argument about GDP. The strategy deals with that. We are saying that GDP is only one indicator and that its use must be qualified by taking into account all the other factors that are so important to sustainable development. Although the strategy puts the economy first, the economy that it advocates is resource-efficient—it is a green enterprise economy.

Sarah Boyack made a good point about the fact that the outside bodies from which she had received briefings were all NGOs and green organisations. Where were the responses from the other bodies that Maureen Macmillan listed? We are talking about a three-legged stool that comprises social, economic and environmental legs. We need all three legs of the stool.

Mark Ballard: The member says that we need all three legs of the stool, so why should we make the economic leg a priority?

Nora Radcliffe: Because we need it to sustain the other two.

I liked what Sarah Boyack said about transforming the economy through creativity, redesign and rethinking and doing that with an eye to justice and fairness.

Rosie Kane was right to say that words alone are not enough and that we need action urgently, but she might have given the Executive some credit for the large investment that it has made in public transport, for example. She mentioned all the complaints that are made to SEPA, but there are two ways of looking at that. At least people have an organisation to complain to that will do something about their complaints. She also mentioned the fact that we have only 11 specialist environmental procurators fiscal. As someone who campaigned for their introduction, I can say that that is a big advance on none, which is what we had when the Scottish Parliament came into force. Perhaps we should now move on to having specialist environmental courts, which could give us better decision making on environmental matters.

John Swinney spoke of his frustration about the lack of progress, which I think all of us share. In his speech, he gave us a useful reminder of the problems that arise when Governments start to put policy into practice in an imperfect world with finite resources. Most of what we want to do is neither easy nor straightforward; it will need energy and determination from the Government and from the Parliament in scrutinising the Government and exerting the pressure that drives forward agendas.

I endorse what Maureen Macmillan said about the place of micro-renewables. Her suggestion that they could be incorporated as part of a central

heating scheme is a good one. Jamie Stone focused on the breadth and interconnectedness of the sustainability agenda. I endorse the points that he made about the elements of sustainability that do not immediately spring to mind, particularly in the rural context.

My comments on John Scott's speech follow on neatly from that. He spoke about social injustice, the need for well-being and a reduction in human resource wastage. As he pointed out, more local food for local people means an awful lot for sustainable development objectives. Des McNulty was right to say that we have to take a global perspective: hard choices have to be made. He was the first member to point out unequivocally that there will be losers—us. We must face up to that fact.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute.

Nora Radcliffe: Donald Gorrie said that we should focus on delivery; we should be able to demonstrate that we have struck the right balance in that respect. What he said about planning was also important. I agree that we should empower individuals, perhaps in every sense of the word. Linda Fabiani made an excellent and constructive speech. I am sorry to say that she spoiled it at the end when she returned to the theme of full powers. We will have to agree to disagree on that one.

Alex Fergusson was perhaps a wee bit hard on what has been done since 1999. I will mention only the three Rs—recycling, renewables and railways. We have made progress on all of them. Again, his speech illustrated the fact that everyone needs to work together and developments need to be looked at holistically. I return to the remarks that Donald Gorrie made about planning.

I think that it was Alex Neil who mentioned derelict land, which is another wasted resource. Much of the sustainability agenda is about waste and eliminating waste.

If I may, I will finish by saying—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Quickly.

Nora Radcliffe: The strategy is an all-embracing one. It is difficult to do justice to it in a short period. I want to pick out two short phrases from Ross Finnie's speech—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. The member must close.

Nora Radcliffe: They are

“better informed and ... more demanding”

and

“evidence and ... the best available science”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are short of time. I can give Mr Crawford only six minutes in which to close for the SNP. *[Interruption.]* I beg your pardon, Mr Crawford. You have confused me entirely. The next speaker is Mr Brocklebank, who has six minutes.

16:38

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): Of course, the Conservatives welcome the Executive's sustainable development strategy and its core aspiration, which is to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Alex Fergusson was right in saying that, after six years in power, the Executive should be able to provide rather more evidence than Ross Finnie outlined to show that its policies are beginning to make a positive impact on Scottish lives while at the same time reducing our global footprint.

It is all very well for the minister to stand up in the chamber and boast about improvements in health, education, the environment and the like, but when we begin to examine the specifics, the gap between the haves and the have-nots appears to be growing ever wider, as John Scott outlined.

Some years ago, I made a television documentary for Channel 4 called “Scotland the Grave”. The programme compared two communities on the outskirts of Glasgow: Clarkston and Castlemilk. Life expectancy rates in the two communities varied by around 10 years. Given that we made our film a decade ago, we would expect the figures to be beginning to improve. In fact, according to *The Scotsman* last Wednesday, the life expectancy of people in the wealthiest suburb of Glasgow is 87 years whereas in the poorest it is only 54 years. Based on those figures, poverty and inequality are not improving; they are getting worse.

Mr Swinney: Will Mr Brocklebank reflect on whether the Conservative Government contributed in any way to undermining the life expectancy of people in those deprived communities at a time when it could have done something about it?

Mr Brocklebank: I rather expected that kind of intervention, but the fact is that we have now had six years since that Conservative Government and, on the latest figures, the situation is now three times worse.

In the brief time that I have to sum up the debate, I cannot hope to deal adequately with all eight of the Executive's cross-cutting sustainability targets. Conservative colleagues have made telling points of their own—I was also impressed by the speeches of Sarah Boyack, Des McNulty

and Mark Ruskell—so I will content myself with enlarging on only two broad headings: energy efficiency and renewables; and the food supply chain, including fisheries.

In what is likely to be the biggest continuing global crisis, in relation to energy, Scotland is better placed than most countries. We have plentiful supplies of wind, wave and biomass that can make a meaningful contribution to our overall energy needs. However, we must be realistic. We support energy efficiency and the development of renewables, which will be an extremely important part of our energy equation. There is no doubt that we are seeing the beginning of the end of the age of cheap fossil fuels. That was true long before the Iraq war and the situation will only get worse, so we must consider alternative energy supplies. However, the Executive's current energy policy has allowed wind power to get ahead in the market to the detriment of other renewable technologies, which has resulted in mounting opposition to large-scale developments, particularly in areas of outstanding natural beauty and resources in Scotland, to which Ross Finnie referred.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Brocklebank: I have taken one already and I would like to press on.

As Jamie Stone pointed out, Scotland's biggest industry is tourism, so we must balance the benefits of onshore wind farms carefully against the adverse visual impact that they would have in certain areas. That is why we feel that the planning regime provides inadequate guidance to local authorities, communities and developers on the siting of wind farms. On that issue, I agree with John Swinney.

I am happy to say that, a year or so ago, I was involved in a successful campaign against the siting of a wind farm in one of the most scenic parts of north-east Fife. Fife Council turned down the proposed development at Clatto, but now, a year later, we have a brand new proposal from another company to site a wind farm at Auchtermuchty fewer than 5 miles away from the site that was originally proposed. This time, the proposed wind turbines would be only 40ft smaller than the highest level of the Forth rail bridge and would be visible from many areas in Angus and the Lothians. Is that really what the aim of conserving Scotland's areas of outstanding natural beauty is about? A shift in the focus from onshore wind farms to other renewables, including biomass and biofuels, and increased energy efficiency measures would be more cost effective and would make far more sense for the economy's long-term sustainability.

I will say a word on sustainable food production and fisheries. It is imperative that we sustain the livelihoods of farmers and fishermen, who have served the nation well for many generations. I welcome the investigation that the Environment and Rural Development Committee will shortly mount into the liquid milk price chain. It is nothing short of scandalous that our dairy farmers receive as little as 17p a litre for their milk, while it is sold for up to 55p a litre in supermarkets. It is an equal scandal that our hard-working fishermen should see yet further limitations on the number of days that they are allowed to spend at sea, on top of the scrapping of two thirds of the white-fish fleet in the past five years, while—even worse—our European partners demand Community funding to build up their fleets.

The Executive is right to advocate sustainability but, as Donald Gorrie and others mentioned, there is no more important part of the equation than the sustainability and development of our local communities, many of whom depend on the land and the sea for their very existence. We endorse the minister's aspiration to reduce Scotland's global footprint, but reducing that footprint by turning our backs on our food producers and throwing our farmers and fishermen on the dole is neither sustainable nor sensible. I beg members to support our amendment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Bruce Crawford to speak, I will respond to the point of order that he raised earlier. The standing orders are silent on the running order of closing speeches. Members who have been business managers will know that the protocol is to call the closing speakers in order of the size of their political party. That is of course not subject to standing orders. Closing speakers from the parties that moved amendments are fitted in as and when the closing speeches are called.

I now call Bruce Crawford. I am afraid that I can give him only six minutes.

16:44

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I am grateful for that clarification of the point that I raised.

I agree with many of the ways in which the Executive is dealing with sustainability across Government departments, which the minister laid out. I look forward to the publication of the climate change programme, which will follow in the next few weeks.

The minister will be glad to hear that I agree with others. That is a good starting point. It has been a constructive start and a good debate, with—Des McNulty—just enough tension to make it worth while.

Robin Harper raised the issue of investment in the school estate. Paragraph 13.6 of "Choosing Our Future" says:

"Investment in the school estate—over £2.3 billion by the end of this decade—means that school children in Scotland will be learning in buildings that embody sustainable design principles."

The minister's response was more than a little flippant. The Executive needs to reconsider how PPP contracts are constructed, so that some of the warm words that the minister raised in that regard can be put into action.

Rob Gibson raised joined-up government and the Parliament's lack of powers. He put into perspective why the Parliament needs more powers to deal with issues of sustainability more holistically. What Linda Fabiani said—that sometimes we need the stick rather than the carrot approach—backed up the SNP's amendment on introducing significant targets.

I agreed with much of what Mark Ballard said. Where I disagree with the Greens' position is on the Forth road bridge. What I hear today is that if in future the bridge becomes unsustainable and has to close for engineering reasons, the Greens will not replace it. If we are really talking about sustainability on the basis of the three legs of the stool mentioned by Nora Radcliffe, I find that argument incredible. Mark Ruskell might wish to disabuse me of my view.

Mr Ruskell: The problem is that the SNP subscribes to the Forth Estuary Transport Authority's position. FETA not only wants a replacement bridge; it wants to build two bridges in addition to the existing one. That is not sustainable and will not reduce congestion.

Bruce Crawford: I have not said that I agree with the FETA position. I have talked about a replacement or new bridge, depending on the technical implications. The Greens have still not told us what their position is if the bridge proves to be unsustainable in future. Are they saying that they would not replace it? If that is the case, we would no longer have that three-legged stool, because the economic and social fabric of the east of Scotland would fall apart.

Sarah Boyack made some good points on NGOs. Others have commented on the lack of contributions from others in Scottish civic and industrial society. I draw Sarah Boyack's attention to the fact that the powers are not available to the Parliament to deal, through legislation, with aspects of the throwaway society that she talked about. For example, why cannot we introduce an obligation on companies to ensure, where appropriate, that the design of products incorporates waste minimisation principles at the development stage, including the capacity to

repair, reuse and recycle? Why cannot we place a duty on producers to report in their annual statements of accounts on their use of natural resources and how they intend to reduce consumption? Unfortunately, the Parliament does not have the power to impose such duties; if we did, we could approach the issue more sustainably.

John Swinney raised the strategic waste fund. "Choosing Our Future" sets out the Executive's overview on reducing waste for the good of our health and well-being, which I accept. It also talks about how we can reduce Scotland's global impact and our footprint on the world. That is important. As I am sure the minister will accept, waste is a huge part of that. The Executive has set targets and has made good progress, particularly when we consider that Scotland started off as an international disgrace, at the bottom of the European recycling league. We are no longer there. Initial progress was slow but, to the Executive's credit, between 2003 and 2004 there was a 5.2 per cent increase in recycling. That is to be welcomed. The total rate of recycling is now 17.3 per cent. However, the rate of increase will need to reach 7.7 per cent by the end of this year if we are to stay on target.

The reality is that many of the early recycling gains have been made. The easy stuff has been done. We need to examine the real hard stuff—the investment in reclamation processes for the long term, where we have a significant difficulty, particularly when we consider the funding position. As John Swinney said, the amount has been reduced. A document that was issued in June last year said:

"Given pressures on public spending it is inevitable that SWF awards will be constrained."

We saw the impact of that in the budget revision document that was published recently.

The Executive needs to break out of the central Scotland-centric position that it has taken, because the Executive's documentation says that three major projects are gobbling up all the money. That is not just an issue for Perth and Kinross. The minister must take the matter seriously and sort the mess out.

16:51

The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin): As Ross Finnie explained, "Choosing Our Future" marks a step change in the Executive's continuing work to deliver on its long-standing commitment to sustainable development.

It is good that we have had the debate. Sustainable development concerns us all. We may have different views about how we arrive at a

more sustainable Scotland, but there has been remarkable consensus. Sustainable development presents new challenges and opportunities, not just to the Executive, but to the Parliament, to see how best we can strengthen accountability to the people of Scotland.

As a reflection of the cross-cutting nature of sustainable development, we have heard a wide range of valuable speeches from members throughout the chamber. I will try to respond to the issues and questions that were raised as best I can in the time that is available.

Rob Gibson and several others talked about targets, and Executive support for local footprint targets was mentioned. With WWF, we are considering local footprint projects in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and North Lanarkshire. We are working with local authorities to analyse their footprints with a view to identifying and reducing resource use. The project will also develop materials for use in schools to measure footprints at school and individually and we are making clearer what individuals, businesses and communities can do as a priority for a sustainable future.

Communications are of course vital. We need to communicate to people what they can do and the part that they can play in creating a sustainable Scotland.

What can I say about the start of Alex Johnstone's speech? Is it the new Tories with a new leader and a new Alex Johnstone? My goodness. The degree of consensus has been interesting. I will resist the temptation to mention the Conservatives' green past—or lack of it. I welcome the consensus.

Various members—notably John Swinney, Linda Fabiani and Robin Harper—discussed the school estate. As Ross Finnie said, we will examine whether the PPP schools guidance is right. We have guidance on sustainable school buildings. In 2003, we produced with COSLA our vision for well-designed, well-built and well-managed schools. We need to examine how well that is being put into practice.

I agree absolutely with Linda Fabiani that we need to use more wood. I know that she shares with me a passion for architecture and building. She will be aware of the wood for good campaign, which the Executive, the Forestry Commission and forest industries have supported.

Sarah Boyack, Mark Ballard and other members talked about the need for committees to become involved. I agree absolutely. The most important thing is that Parliament can take part and scrutinise the contribution that portfolio expenditure makes—the difference that is being made throughout the Executive. We would

welcome that. We need to be able to work in partnership with the Parliament and we need to be clear about the contribution that each portfolio makes, whether it is negative or positive, to sustainable development objectives.

The issue of well-being was raised by many members. Promoting personal well-being is one of the core aims of sustainable development, whether it is good health, a decent income, meaningful work, a high-quality environment, spending time with friends and family or taking part in activities that are not linked to work, such as those that relate to sport, culture or volunteering. All those elements are part of the mix that contributes to our sense of well-being as individuals and as a country.

Bruce Crawford: How can we encourage people to switch off their computers, televisions, digi-boxes and so on at home? That sort of thing gobbles up 25 per cent of the energy that is used in most homes.

Rhona Brankin: I agree with the member's point. I make a real effort to do the things that the member is talking about, such as not overfilling the kettle, switching off lights and walking whenever possible. I know that that is a challenge for us all, which everyone in the chamber needs to take up.

Rosie Kane mentioned Professor Poustie's study for SEPA. We welcome that valuable study, which helped to identify practical ways in which SEPA can work to secure environmental justice in the communities that are currently most likely to be excluded from environmental decision making. Of course, environmental decision making is hugely important for communities that have been excluded from that in the past.

Environmental justice now features as a specific priority in the statutory sustainable development guidance that is issued to SEPA by the Scottish Executive and we need to work closely with SEPA to define the agency's policy priorities in the light of the most recent studies.

However, I fundamentally disagree with the SSP's views on the Dalkeith bypass, as expressed by Rosie Kane. The poor quality of air in Dalkeith town centre is a hugely important issue of environmental justice. The appalling health legacy of the coalmining industry in constituencies such as mine, which have high instances of lung disease, is dreadful. If Rosie Kane understood that, she would understand why my constituents and many others have been campaigning for a bypass for years in order to get high-quality, clean air in Dalkeith town centre.

Rosie Kane: Will the minister give way?

Rhona Brankin: No.

Being able to participate in decisions that affect our local environment is a crucial part of

environmental justice. Indeed, the Scottish Executive has commissioned a study to assess the best models for ensuring that communities have access to useful, comprehensible environmental information and advice. That study will be published shortly. We will decide in the light of those findings how best to take that work forward.

To Donald Gorrie, I say that planning is absolutely key to delivering sustainable development and environmental justice. At the heart of the modernised planning system, there will be an explicit requirement to have due regard to the principles of sustainable development. In addition, all plans will be subject to strategic environmental assessment.

Alex Neil and several others raised the issue of vacant and derelict land. We are tackling that huge issue, which we believe can make a major difference to communities. From 2004 to 2006, we have allocated £20 million to tackling the long-term vacant and derelict land that is an appalling blight on some of our communities. That money enables action to be taken to deal with at least 319 hectares of such land in Glasgow, Dundee and North Lanarkshire—indeed, in North Lanarkshire alone, it will be used in relation to 154 hectares. There is already a commitment to invest a further £24.3 million over the next two years. That is hugely important and can play an important role in environmental justice in our communities.

There has been an amazing degree of consensus this afternoon. I will resist the temptation to bait the Tories on their record on green issues. Suffice it to say that I welcome their late, if rather half-hearted, conversion this afternoon.

One thing that we all can accept is that every one of us in this chamber must play our part in delivering a sustainable Scotland. We have to live sustainably and put sustainability at the heart of all our policies. “Choosing Our Future” is an important start, but it is only a start. Ross Finnie, I and the Executive look forward to working with everybody in Scotland and everyone in the chamber who is committed to achieving a sustainable Scotland. I urge members to support the motion.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of two business motions, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau: S2M-3798, setting out a revision to the business programme; and S2M-3799, setting out a business programme.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 12 January 2006—

Thursday 12 January 2006

after,

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

insert,

2.00 pm Election to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 18 January 2006

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Ministerial Statement: The Cultural Commission

followed by Procedures Committee Debate: Report on the Private Bill Committee assessors

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 19 January 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Executive Debate: Economic Benefits of the Air Routes Development Fund

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time—
Justice and Law Officers;
Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning

2.55 pm Stage 3 Proceedings: Joint Inspection of Children's Services and Inspection of Social Work Services (Scotland) Bill

followed by Health Bill Legislative Consent Motion – UK Legislation

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 January 2006

2.30 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Executive Business
followed by Business Motion
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 26 January 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Executive Business
 11.40 am General Question Time
 12 noon First Minister's Question Time
 2.15 pm Themed Question Time—
 Finance and Public Services and
 Communities;
 Education and Young People,
 Tourism, Culture and Sport
 2.55 pm Executive Business
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Margaret Curran to move motions S2M-3796 and S2M-3797, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (West Coast) (No. 18) (Scotland) Order 2005 (SSI 2005/626) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2006 be approved.—[*Ms Margaret Curran.*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):

There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-3792.1, in the name of Rob Gibson, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3792, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the sustainable development strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)

Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 36, Against 79, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-3792.2, in the name of Alex Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3792, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the sustainable development strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

AGAINST

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)

Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

The Convener: The result of the division is: For 30, Against 65, Abstentions 20.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S2M-3792.3, in the name of Mark Ruskell, which seeks to amend motion S2M-3792, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the sustainable

development strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)

McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 16, Against 78, Abstentions 21.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S2M-3792, in the name of Ross Finnie, on the sustainable development strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Mr Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)

McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 110, Against 0, Abstentions 5.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Executive's new sustainable development strategy, "Choosing our future"; supports the strategy's vision of a vibrant resource-efficient economy with Scotland as a leader in green enterprise; welcomes its emphasis on reducing Scotland's global environmental impact, protecting its natural heritage and resources for the long term, improving the quality of life of individuals and communities and securing environmental justice for those who suffer the worst local environments, and calls on all sections of society in Scotland to play their part in delivering these objectives.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S2M-3796, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning) (West Coast) (No. 18) (Scotland) Order 2005 (SSI 2005/626) be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth and final question is, that motion S2M-3797, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2006 be approved.

Post Offices (Closure)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-3735, in the name of Dr Elaine Murray, on the closure of six post offices. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament expresses its concern over Post Office Ltd's announcement that it will be closing six town centre post offices, including the main post office in Dumfries, replacing them with franchises in SPAR shops; notes that SPAR itself is a franchise; is concerned over the implications for staff numbers and terms and conditions of employment; believes that in cases such as Dumfries the new location is less convenient for customers; further believes that the proposed arrangements may not offer a sustainable and long-term future for these post offices; expresses concern that the announcement was made less than two weeks before Christmas and considers that Post Office Ltd should extend the consultation period beyond the current seven weeks to ensure that all customers get the opportunity to express their views, and believes that no irreversible decisions should be made without paying full consideration and attention to the views of customers and staff.

17:08

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. I also thank the members of all parties who signed the motion, thus enabling the debate to take place.

On 13 December, less than two weeks before Christmas and during one of the busiest weeks of the year for counter staff, Post Office Ltd—a company that is wholly owned by the Royal Mail Group—announced the closure of a further six town centre Crown post offices and the transfer of their functions to private sector franchises. Those post offices are in my constituency, in Dumfries, and in Perth, Bathgate, Dunfermline, Coatbridge and Hope Street.

The Post Office Ltd press release of 13 December stated that there would be a seven-week consultation period on the proposals. However, subsequent meetings and communications with the Post Office's spokespeople have indicated that a deal has already been struck with CJ Lang & Son Ltd, and, in the case of Dumfries, with Malhotra & Partners Ltd, with the support of CJ Lang & Son Ltd. Management met staff and their trade union representatives the following Monday—I am pleased to see that members of the Communication Workers Union are in the gallery—and staff were then told that they had two weeks in which to decide whether they wanted to take voluntary redundancy terms or to transfer elsewhere in the Royal Mail Group. Last week, the new posts in the Spar franchises were advertised

in the local job centres. That is not what I understand by the word "consultation".

There is massive public opposition to the proposals in my constituency, and since 14 December, I have been running a petition that calls for a rethink. Despite the Christmas holiday period, there are already more than 4,500 signatures on that petition.

I am pleased to welcome members of Dumfries and Galloway Council, including its chief executive and convener, who are here for the south of Scotland alliance reception later this evening. The council has expressed grave reservations about the effect of the proposals on its town centre regeneration proposals. It has offered to take over the shop; indeed, it could even help to run the post office from its own premises. However, for reasons that I do not understand, the council has been told that a conflict of interests would be involved in its doing that. It has therefore offered to help Post Office Ltd to find more suitable premises that are nearer to the centre of the town.

The Crown post office is currently located at the main local bus service interchange in the town centre. Post Office Ltd has said that the new location will be 300m away, but the distance as the pedestrian walks rather than as the crow flies is more like 500m and it includes a steep descent down Bank Street from the High Street. The location would be far less convenient for older and disabled people, who make up a significant proportion of the post office's customers. Indeed, after the announcement, I observed a disabled man in a wheelchair attempting to get up Bank Street. If it had not been for a friend of his who ran out of the bookies to help him, he would not have been able to make it up the street. A 70-year-old constituent of mine whose wife is disabled told me that there are 17 car parking spaces for disabled people in the vicinity of the current site, but there would be only two spaces within 200m of the new site. The location is not good for the service.

We have been told that a full range of post office services will be protected, but I cannot see how that can happen. At the moment, the Dumfries post office employs 14 staff, but the new adverts are for only six staff, only two of whom will be full time. The other posts are part-time posts. So far, the maximum number of hours that have been advertised at any of the new locations is only 122 hours per week—there will be fewer hours at some locations. As far as I can see, that will mean that there will be fewer counters and longer queues for customers. Furthermore, all the posts except for the post office manager's post are advertised as paying only 30p an hour above the minimum wage. The manager will be offered the princely sum of £16,000 a year for a 42-hour week. Those amounts do not compare with the

wages that post office staff currently receive—they do not even compare terribly well with the wages that other retailers offer. My daughter's 18-year-old friend who works for Tesco earns more than that. The experienced and dedicated staff who currently work for the Post Office will not work for such wages. I cannot believe that the same service that the general post office currently offers will be on offer.

We know that Post Office Ltd has financial problems and that the transfers are being undertaken to cut down on staff costs. However, the current proposals do not stand up to scrutiny on that basis. Post Office Ltd has told us that nobody will be made compulsorily redundant and that everybody will be able to take voluntary redundancy terms or to transfer elsewhere in the Royal Mail Group. The nearest Crown post offices to Dumfries are in Ayr and Carlisle, which are 60 miles and 35 miles away respectively. Even if staff could travel those distances, they would have to rely on people at those post offices wanting to take voluntary redundancy terms in order to obtain employment. It is unlikely that 14 people would do so. If staff transfer elsewhere in the Royal Mail Group, it will not make the savings that it needs to make. If the process continues, a point must come at which it must be recognised that people will have to be made compulsorily redundant. In those circumstances, staff should receive compulsory rather than voluntary redundancy terms.

I am not confident that, in the light of its actions so far, Post Office Ltd will reverse its decision, but I urge my constituents to write to Andy Bayfield of Post Office Ltd and to copy their representations to Postwatch Scotland. I ask people to stress the total unsuitability of the proposals for Dumfries and the effect on the post office's business if it moves to the new location. Many of my constituents have told me that they are unlikely to transfer their business if there is a new location. They are likely to use the high street banks and their own local branches.

We saw something similar happening about a year ago when Safeway was taken over by Morrisons and the in-store post office was closed. At that time, we were told that the Dumfries town centre post office was safe—but it was not. We were told recently that only 15 per cent of the in-store business had transferred from Morrisons to the new Crown post office. What if that happens again? What happens if the business does not transfer from Great King Street—its current location—to the new office in Whitesands? It is quite possible that the footfall that underlies the business plan that Spar has put together just will not happen because people will not go there. Then what happens? We have been told that CJ Lang is tied in for five years, after which it has to give 12 months' notice, but how can the small business

franchisee who operates the store do that? He might be bankrupt by then.

Post Office Ltd, the Royal Mail Group and the Department of Trade and Industry, which owns the shares, need to reflect on whether the Post Office offers a public service or whether it is just a business. If the Post Office is no longer to be a public service, it cannot count on the loyalty and affection of the public as it does at the moment.

Since the 1980s, there has been a long-term programme of conversions and closures of post offices, and only 42 remain in Scotland. To those 42 locations that still have a GPO, I say this is coming shortly—just wait. It is coming to a post office near you, too.

17:16

Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Elaine Murray on securing the debate. The number of members who are in the chamber reflects the shock and incredulity many of us experienced when we heard the announcement. I will be brief, as many members want to speak. Most of us will rehearse much the same arguments.

We all accept the need for efficiency in the commercial operation of the Post Office, which faces competition from within and outwith the United Kingdom. However, it is a logic that the Government does not always fully accept, as it does not give the Post Office full commercial freedom. Only last week, we read in the newspapers that funding for some mechanisation improvements in the Royal Mail's main sorting office was being held up by the dead hand of the Treasury. The truth is that the Post Office and the Royal Mail can never be fully free from political influence—as witness this debate, which is part of that political influence. The Royal Mail has a public service obligation, and even for those of us who are not royalists that means at least that it is a public or state service. We owe it some consideration and it owes us and its customers some consideration.

The Post Office has a major commercial advantage in its name, its reputation, its labour force, its network and its high street presence. I suggest that those advantages are not immutable: they could be lost. It is commercial folly for a brand leader potentially to give up its high street presence, which, once lost, will not be regained. That is certainly the case in the changes that are proposed in Dumfries. Elaine Murray mentioned the fact that all the branches in the former Safeway stores were lost when Safeway sold out to Morrisons. There is no guarantee that the contract that is being sought with Spar will continue in perpetuity. If that contract falls, the post offices will not return to our high streets.

As Elaine Murray said, it is a public relations disaster in terms of staff and contractual dealings for the Royal Mail to act in advance of the consultation as if all is done and dusted. It is an insult to all involved—staff, the public and us in this chamber. I urge the Post Office to heed the motion and what is said in the debate. I urge it to heed the results of the public consultation, the strength of which may surprise it. I also urge it to distinguish carefully between the inevitable protests that accompany any change in the public arena at any time and the deep concerns that have prompted this debate.

17:19

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): The subject that we are debating is important, although, regrettably, it is a reserved issue and we do not have political control of the Post Office.

Elaine Murray set out very well the arguments that relate to Dumfries. As I understand it, the effect of the closure of some post offices will not be so severe as it is in Dumfries, but each case has to be considered separately.

The debate raises two major issues. First, whether from a Scottish perspective or a United Kingdom perspective, we must get our policy on the Post Office much clearer. Is it a public service or is it merely another way of making money? There is no clear public policy on the issue. We should talk to our colleagues at Westminster and try to establish a clearer line on what the Post Office is supposed to deliver. I am sure that we all support it in diversifying and providing new services, but we have to get our act together on policy.

Secondly, the problem with our profession is that when an issue such as this comes up, we get documents from the large body—in this case the Post Office—that is doing things some people dislike. The documents say that everything will be marvellous, that no one will lose their job, that no one will be inconvenienced and that the sun will still shine. We then receive other documents from user groups or trade unions that set out their view of how bad the whole thing is. It is possible that, just as one side overstates how good the situation is, the other side overstates how bad it is. How do we sort that out?

One good aspect of this Parliament is the Public Petitions Committee. I wonder whether we could have another committee that considers this type of situation and tries to establish the truth. If the anti side is grossly exaggerating its argument, we should tell it that it has it wrong; if the defensive management is overstating the benefits of a scheme, we could make some points against that, too. I might have spent some years as a school

teacher, but I believe that we should try to establish some discipline in the information we are given.

In this case, I can tell from the documents that I have been reading that one side or the other is telling porkies. I would be interested to know which it is. I suggest that we consider our procedures, because the issue is very important. As I said, how acceptable or unacceptable closure is will be different for each individual post office, but I am very glad that we are debating the point.

17:23

Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab): I congratulate Elaine Murray on securing this evening's debate. It is significant that there are so many members in the chamber. Like most others, I agree with the sentiments in Elaine Murray's motion.

What is most concerning about the proposal for the six post offices is that they are not tiny, out-of-the-way post offices or sub-post offices—they are town centre post offices that we thought would always be there. Most members in West Lothian—and in Dumfries—believed that the post office review was complete in their local area, but then, out of the blue, this proposal landed on their desks.

I wonder whether the Bathgate post office is being proposed because it is owned by the Post Office, it is a large area of land and the Post Office thinks it might just be good for housing. I hope not, because that is not what Bathgate needs; what Bathgate needs is a post office.

There is great support from local people for the status quo. Older people have confidence in the post office and can be seen there daily, using it to pick up their pension; many young people still have their first savings account at the post office; and us in-betweenies still pick up our child benefit regularly at the post office. I even managed—I have it here with me to prove it—to get a post office card so that I can do just that. It was not easy.

Most members will have received from the Post Office the letter that explains the proposals and the equally telling e-mail, which we received today, that responds to the briefing that we received from the Communication Workers Union last week. Today's e-mail tried too hard, I found, to justify the proposals.

In the letter, we were told that five of the six post offices would become part of the retail shops of CJ Lang. However, I understand that CJ Lang made that approach to Post Office Ltd and that such an arrangement was not in the original proposal. I am concerned that the proposal is more about

bolstering CJ Lang's Spar businesses than about my constituents or even the post offices.

Others have mentioned concerns about Spar's future commercial viability. I am also concerned that the proposals will not, as we have been told, ensure a financially viable future for the post offices. In my area, people have said that they will not queue in the rain, which they will need to do if the post office moves to the small Spar shop. I am concerned that the level of business will fall and that the change could turn out to be just a stepping stone to complete closure, which would leave constituents with no post office service.

We have been told that there will be no compulsory redundancy, but that seems to be just a play on words. As we have heard, many workers would find it impossible to transfer to another post office because there is no other post office nearby. Especially for women who have other, caring, responsibilities, such a move would not be feasible.

The proposed new post office for Bathgate will have only six counters, whereas the present one has eight. That is not an improvement, but a reduction in service. Like my Westminster colleague, Michael Connarty MP, I believe that the post office is not just a business but a service. Although it must be efficient, profit should not be the only influence. Does the Post Office realise that the constant reviews and threats of job losses undermine staff morale?

Finally, I hope that the Post Office will listen to the consultation responses, which in my area—as, I hear, in other areas—have been overwhelmingly against the proposals. The people of Bathgate clearly do not want this change. The Post Office has convinced no one. I hope that it is listening.

17:27

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): I join others in congratulating Elaine Murray on obtaining this evening's debate. The issue may be a reserved matter but it affects a number of people in the east of my constituency who use the post office in Dumfries.

The loss of any major asset from the centre of a community is always hard to bear. One need only look at any small rural village that has lost its school, shop, church, post office or even its pub—some villages have lost all those things—to see the devastating impact that such a loss can have.

Only last night, I attended a public meeting in the Haugh of Urr, which is one of three communities in the Castle Douglas area that are taking part in a pilot scheme for a new form of postal service delivery in small rural communities. No one who was present at that meeting—some of

whom are in the public gallery this evening—will or can doubt the depth of feeling in that community, whether or not they agree with that feeling.

One lesson from that pilot scheme is that Post Office Ltd has a long way to go before it can be said to be promoting communication, consultation and inclusiveness in undertaking the efficiency programme that was set by the UK Government at Westminster. We should be under no illusion about the fact that the actions of Post Office Ltd are a direct consequence of Government policy. It is for the Government to decide whether the Post Office is a service or a business.

I have no difficulty with the concept of an efficiently run Post Office. Unlike, I suspect, some members, I have little difficulty with the principle that the Post Office might in effect franchise out service delivery, notwithstanding the serious staff issues to which Elaine Murray referred. That model appears to have been fairly successful, at least in economic terms, where it has been carried out. But I have considerable difficulty when the transition from a directly managed post office, such as that in Great King Street in Dumfries, to a Spar franchise retail outlet is presented as more or less a fait accompli.

I also have difficulty with the accompanying consultation exercise, which has little to do with consultation and a great deal to do with information. This is exactly what happened at the beginning of the rural scheme I mentioned, which I believe would have been much better received by the local community if there had been genuine consultation, openness and inclusiveness on the part of Post Office Ltd. I am sorry that lessons appear not to have been learned in relation to the exercise in Dumfries.

The closure of the Great King Street branch would be all the more poignant as it is one of a tiny handful of UK post offices that has been awarded and bears the charter mark. Although the branch wears the badge with great distinction, it will be lost for ever in any transfer.

I understand that the change in Dunfermline would involve a Spar shop moving into the existing post office. I am not convinced that that model has been fully explored with regard to the post office in Dumfries, where I imagine transferring the sorting office would provide ample space for a popular retail outlet in the very centre of the town.

Last week, when I and our former colleague David Mundell met Royal Mail officials, I was heartened to hear one official highlight Post Office Ltd's commitment to maintain a strong presence on the high street. I thought that that was excellent, but it stands in direct relation to the proposal for Dumfries. Frankly, anyone who thinks that Whitesands is the high street of Dumfries

knows neither the town nor the area. Whitesands is not and has never been the high street, and putting the post office into the Spar there will not make it so. In summary, I am happy with the principle, but I am deeply unhappy with the proposed location.

I note with considerable interest that—here I quote rather reluctantly from *The Guardian*—

“The new boss of Britain's post office network”,

Mr Alan Cook,

“expects a showdown within months ... with ministers over the future of rural branches, many of which would shut if the government makes cuts to its £150m subsidy.”

I hope that he has that showdown and that he is successful. Rural Scotland and its communities need their post offices, and I do not see how they can be maintained without some level of public financial input.

I very much support Elaine Murray's motion and congratulate her on securing the debate. I trust that Post Office Ltd will not totally close its mind to other alternatives in Dumfries until all possibilities have been thoroughly and fully explored.

17:31

Chris Ballance (South of Scotland) (Green): I congratulate Elaine Murray on securing the debate and I congratulate her and the *Dumfries & Galloway Standard* on their campaign to save the post office in Dumfries. Their excellent work must be noted.

In her speech, Elaine Murray clearly set out the details of the Post Office's sham consultation, which was the sort of consultation that brings every consultation into bad repute. It is clear that the Post Office's actions over the past six weeks in no sense match what we understand by the word “consultation”. Postwatch Scotland has called for full consultation on the closures, but that has not happened. We need time to mount a consultation, to research the possibilities and to find out what the requirements are, so the Greens call for a full year's reprieve for the post offices to allow for proper consultation, to consider the alternatives and to find ways of keeping Dumfries's general post office open.

Staff say that the Dumfries post office has made a profit every year for the past 10 years. We want to examine the figures and to find out how the Post Office can possibly have built a case for closing that post office. Moreover, the Post Office is a publicly accountable organisation that should provide services in the public's interest. However, although it still has a public service obligation, its decision shows that it has no intention of honouring it. I realise that the issue is reserved, but I do not have much confidence in the UK

Government's ability to persuade the Post Office to live up to its public service obligation and to keep the post offices open. We need look only at the company's track record: when Royal Mail decided, against Government policy, to move its operation from rail to road, the Government could do absolutely nothing to stop it.

The closures are opposed by the Communication Workers Union, Age Concern Scotland, Capability Scotland and the National Pensioners Convention. Surely the weight of all those opinions must be taken on board. Age Concern Scotland says that the proposed changes will not benefit the community, but instead are likely to cause significant problems for older people. Capability Scotland is concerned that the closures will hit disabled people particularly hard. The National Pensioners Convention has run a series of demonstrations across the UK to draw attention to the effects of post office closures. A post office is more than just a series of commercial services; it is a hub for the community and a source of information, and there is no evidence whatever that, under the harsh realities of commercialism, the facilities that are provided by the post offices will be kept.

The Post Office promised us in 1999 "A World Class Service for the 21st Century". Through the closure of a number of main post offices throughout Scotland and the threat to rural deliveries—something that is not covered in the motion, but which goes alongside the threat of closure—that promise is not being kept. In fact, we are going back to a service that will be worse than the service in the 19th century. Customers in Dumfries deserve much better than that, so I congratulate Elaine Murray on her motion and on the campaign.

17:36

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): I am pleased that we have the opportunity to discuss an issue that is of great importance to our constituents. Post Office Ltd should be aware of the strength of feeling that exists, not just among pensioners and other people who use post offices day to day, but among traders. I have received a great deal of correspondence from business customers of Post Office Ltd who are deeply concerned about the implications of the changes for the economic viability of Bathgate.

I am pleased that we have the opportunity to discuss the issue, but there is a certain air of unreality about the debate. People reap what they sow, and we are now seeing the consequences of decisions that were made by Westminster Governments about Post Office Ltd. This is not the first debate on post offices in which I have spoken; I led a debate in 2000 in which the SNP raised the

issue of the UK Government's benefits policy and its consequences. At that time, there were proposals for the rationalisation—otherwise known as closure—of post offices in urban areas with populations of fewer than 10,000.

That is not what is happening here, but I would like to quote what Henry McLeish, who was the responsible minister at the time, said during that debate. He said:

"we have a Government that is building into a bill at Westminster obligations on the post authorities to ensure that there is an effective, viable network. It may be that in some areas the post office is not commercially viable, but is a social necessity. That is the issue that should unite us today. No one would argue against the proposition that we should have an effective network."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 2000; Vol 5, c 486.]

The issue that we are debating now is the movement of post office services into the Spar franchise and whether that will provide an effective network in the future. On a variety of levels, that is certainly open to question. The social inclusion agenda is devolved, which is why we have debated post offices in the past, and why it is an area about which we should have concerns. The idea of pensioners queuing outside in the rain because of the size of the Spar shop in Bathgate is a concern as far as social inclusion, dignity and respect for our pensioners are concerned. That is something that we must consider.

There is also a point about the future viability of post office services, as we have seen in Carmondean in Livingston and elsewhere. When Wm Morrison Supermarkets plc took over Safeway, there were questions about the viability of there being an effective network in the future. Henry McLeish was right to say in 2000 that we had to consider whether the Westminster Government would help to guarantee an effective network, but we are now seeing the results, and the question must be whether there is an effective network. Elaine Murray is right to stand up for her constituents, and Mary Mulligan was right to talk about the Bathgate situation, but people reap what they sow. That must be fully acknowledged.

Post Office Ltd should reconsider the proposals. From a commercial point of view, it should listen to the concerns of small traders and businesspeople about the implications of the proposals for a market town such as Bathgate. It is not a small village; it is a town. It is struggling, but it has a potentially viable future, and its post office is part of that.

The briefing from Post Office Ltd states that there are to be no post office closures. I am sorry, but that is just what it is doing. It is closing the post office in Bathgate and providing its services elsewhere, but there will not be a post office—there will be a Spar shop with a post service in it.

Post Office Ltd also went on to say that although the decision to transfer the management to CJ Lang & Son Ltd is not itself subject to formal consultation, it wants to understand how the planned changes will affect its customers and is keen to seek feedback. How kind—the decision is not subject to consultation. I know that in Bathgate the work to remove refrigerators and create space is already happening. That is wrong. From a public relations point of view, it is an abuse of the public's trust of Post Office Ltd and the benefits that it gets from its title; it is seen as a public service and it benefits from that. People think that the decision is open to consultation, but the briefing shows clearly that it is not. I welcome the debate, but let us be realistic about what is happening and why it is happening.

17:40

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): It is with double sadness that I rise to speak in the debate. I am sad because one of the post offices that is referred to in Elaine Murray's motion lies in my constituency in Queen Anne Street in Dunfermline. I am also sad because opposition to the closure and reduction of post office services was a campaign that my recently deceased colleague Rachel Squire MP was heavily involved with in our constituency. I know what Rachel would have done at Westminster. I am glad to have the opportunity to speak about our Crown post office in Dunfermline in tonight's debate and I thank Elaine Murray for giving me the opportunity.

Alex Fergusson was right to highlight that the situation in Dunfermline is slightly different from that of some other post offices. What is being proposed in Dunfermline is that the Spar shop will come into what is currently the Crown post office. However, the concern of people in Dunfermline—I am sure that Bruce Crawford will talk about this—is that the service that will be available in the new post office will obviously be vastly reduced.

Elaine Murray was right to highlight the impact that the proposal will have on current staff. They have no choice. The nearest Crown post office to Dunfermline after the proposal is carried out will be in Glenrothes, because the Crown post office in Kirkcaldy was closed 12 years ago; its business was transferred and the former Crown post office is now a pub. Staff do not have a realistic option to transfer anywhere else, but what they are perhaps being offered is their old jobs at half their current pay rate. That is a serious issue.

The reduction in staff numbers is also serious. It is proposed that the number of counters in the Dunfermline post office be reduced from the current 14 to eight. That will almost halve the possible service. People who know the Queen Anne Street post office in Dunfermline will know

about the queues that already exist with the number of counters that are there. It is only two years since the sub-post offices at Baldrigeburn, Reid Street and Townhill Road in Dunfermline were closed. The main reason why those stand-alone sub-post offices were closed was they were within a mile-and-a-half radius of the main Crown post office. Given that the three sub-post offices were in existence up until two years ago, the reduction in the service that is available at the Crown post office means that there will be a massive reduction in the service that Post Office Ltd is offering to people who, like myself, live in the centre of Dunfermline.

We must be very careful about saying that we can never have any change, but we should not have change at any cost. I cannot talk about the other post offices, but I have heard what other members have said. We need to be clear that the service that will be available will be reduced—it will certainly be reduced in Dunfermline. We must be clear that that is not only a public relations disaster for Post Office Ltd. If it was just a PR disaster, we could all accept that; however, it is a disaster for people who rely on the services that post offices provide. A reduction in the number of counters and the number of post offices will mean that people who regularly use post offices and rely on their services will get a much reduced service and will end up paying for the changes.

17:45

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I congratulate Elaine Murray on bringing the debate to the chamber, as it is important that we discuss the matter.

Scott Barrie made some important points. The consultation process was not satisfactory; it should have been done with more care and consideration. However, no matter how much consultation there is, there will be genuine concerns about the impact of the post office closures on the salary and terms and conditions of service for many staff. As Scott Barrie said, the position in Dunfermline is different from that in Dumfries, as the post office and the future Spar shop will remain in the same place. That does not, of course, remove the anxiety or concerns of staff. Despite the offer of voluntary redundancies or relocation, the closest place to Dunfermline is Glenrothes, as Scott Barrie pointed out. Many staff will want to remain with Royal Mail—although, looking at how the matter has been handled, one might wonder why. The Post Office must, as other members said, look very closely at what the motion says and at the number of members who have signed up to it.

On the issue of service, the briefing that we got from the Post Office says that the new branches will also offer customers a high-quality grocery

store, as the branches will carry a range of shopping under one roof, and that in some branches the change may also mean longer opening hours on Saturdays. If my understanding is right, that will not affect Dunfermline, because it already opens on Saturdays. We need to enter into serious discussion with the Post Office about what it considers to be the improvements in real terms. As Scott Barrie said, there could be a reduction from 14 counters to eight in the post office in Dunfermline.

Leaving aside for a moment the issues of staffing—although that is by no means to diminish it—and service, it is important to ask ourselves honestly how we reached this position. For better or worse, the changes that have been made at Westminster to how benefits and pensions are paid have had a severe impact on the financial viability of post offices. Indeed, the Communication Workers Union has been led to say that the changes in how benefits and pensions are paid have had severe financial implications for the Post Office.

There is a dispute between the union and the Post Office about the scale of the financial implications. On the one hand, the union says that there has been a loss of £71 million across the whole group; the Post Office, however, claims that the loss is only £71 million across the directly managed units. No matter how we look at it, the Post Office is making a severe financial loss, and it is being told by Government that it must address that loss. It is taking action as required by the Westminster Government. Are Labour members saying that they are distancing themselves from the decisions taken at Westminster? Those decisions have led to the closures that we are debating.

While recognising the difficulties, we must be honest with ourselves. Fiona Hyslop hit the nail on the head when she said that we reap what we sow. We can protest about what is happening and about how staff are being treated and ask whether the service will be better. However, should we not also be protesting about the process that allowed us to reach this position in the first place?

17:48

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Elaine Murray on securing the debate. It has been pointed out that postal services are a reserved issue, so I wish to start by recognising the work that my Westminster colleague, Tom Clarke, has done in raising with the Post Office the concerns of the people of Coatbridge.

The main post office in my constituency is set to be franchised as part of the proposed changes.

Under the proposals, the central post office in Coatbridge will remain at its present location on Main Street. It will be owned by the Post Office but will be operated by CJ Lang & Son as a combined post office and Spar shop. As with other post office closures, staff have been offered voluntary redundancy packages or the opportunity of alternative employment. That means that CJ Lang will be recruiting an entirely new staff for the branch with, as Elaine Murray and Scott Barrie pointed out, less pay and benefits than those enjoyed by the highly trained and experienced staff in the Coatbridge post office.

Current post office staff who want to remain in their jobs and who do not want to transfer or relocate because they have childcare issues, for example, will have to take voluntary redundancy and apply for their own job for less pay—if they are appointed. That is extremely concerning. Despite the Post Office's assurances that it will continue to train staff and monitor the levels of service that are provided in stores, I believe that a drop in conditions for staff will ultimately result in a drop in levels of service. That is unacceptable.

Coatbridge post office is a standalone main branch that has an average of between 6,000 and 7,000 customers in a town of 45,000 people. That means that a significant proportion of the population access the branch every week. The recent closure of sub-post offices in the area has increased demand for the services that the main office provides. Scott Barrie mentioned that the same situation applies in Dunfermline. Frankly, it is outrageous to suggest replacing the Coatbridge branch with a shop.

Given the small amount of retail space that will be made available as part of the proposed plans, I do not see how CJ Lang can provide adequate retail opportunity on the site to turn around the losses that the Post Office has identified. That leads me to another concern. My initial instinct was that the most commercial option for CJ Lang in the limited retail space that will be provided in Coatbridge might be an off-licence. It would appear that my instinct was correct because the future proprietor has applied to North Lanarkshire Council for a licence to sell alcohol. It did so on 8 December, four days before the franchise announcement was made and the consultation began.

It is of grave concern to me that the main post office in Coatbridge—a town that is all too familiar with the detrimental effects of deprivation and alcohol abuse—might end up containing an off-licence in the same premises in which benefits are paid out. If I was cynical, I might think that the proposal was designed to exploit vulnerable people. Frankly, I am horrified at what has been suggested.

Given that a franchise has already been agreed with a commercial partner and—in the case of Coatbridge—that a licence to sell alcohol was applied for before the consultation started, it would appear that the transfers will go ahead regardless and that the so-called consultation is merely a token gesture or some kind of half-baked public relations exercise on behalf of Post Office Ltd.

The situation is indicative of the wider privatisation agenda, under which profits are put before public service and people. I say to Bruce Crawford that there are implications not just for Westminster, but for the European Union. The further removed from public ownership post offices become, the less control we will have over the services that they provide and the ethos that has driven the postal service for generations. The result of that is that commercial considerations will take precedence over societal needs and priorities. A clear example of that is the proposal to put an off-licence in the main post office in Coatbridge, which is outrageous. I am happy to support Elaine Murray's motion.

17:52

John Swinburne (Central Scotland) (SSCUP): I thank Elaine Murray for securing the debate.

The Post Office is a national institution in Scotland. It was 97 years ago, in 1909, that the first old-age pension payments were made in post offices all over the country.

Unfortunately, central Government has coldly and cynically done a Ratners on the Post Office. The Post Office is a great institution that should never have been subjected to such treatment from any central Government. It is even more disquieting to know that it is a Labour Government that has carried through the proposals that we are discussing.

Most of the points that I would have made have already been made. All that I can say is that the Royal Mail will be next—members should watch out for the vultures cherry picking its services. Postal services in rural Scotland and other non-profitable areas will be thrown to the wolves, just as our tremendous Post Office institution is being thrown to the wolves by uncaring politicians.

17:54

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): As other members have done, I begin by congratulating Elaine Murray on securing the debate. Her motion is on a fairly emotive subject, in that it focuses on the closure of post offices. As a constituency member, I am acutely aware of a number of the issues that other members have raised. I hope that the one thing that all of us across the parties

would agree on is that post offices are an extremely important and integral part of any community.

Donald Gorrie was one of the members who referred to the Post Office Ltd briefing paper that most if not all members will be in possession of. It briefs members on the reasons for the changes to the post offices at Bathgate, Coatbridge, Dunfermline, Perth, Hope Street in Glasgow and, of course, Dumfries, which is the post office that Elaine Murray understandably has a particular interest in, as the constituency member.

I am not sure whether, as Maureen Macmillan suggested, it is possible to try too hard. It was an unfair criticism of Post Office Ltd to say that it has tried too hard to address community and other concerns. Clearly, the paper is an attempt to challenge the assertion that the changes represent closure per se—as I am sure members agree, language is important in these matters. A number of members spoke about the impact and effect on those who are employed in existing post office premises. I have a great deal of sympathy with them on that point, as I do on the issue of service delivery, which a number of members also raised. From my dealings with Post Office Ltd and the Royal Mail Group, I know that the views that have been expressed today will be considered carefully. Before coming to a final view on the matter, they will take on board a number of the points of detail that have been raised.

In that context, I will address briefly some of the other issues that were raised in the debate. An important part of the process, as I think Bruce Crawford and other members said, is that the Parliament gets the opportunity to ensure that possible loss of service is discussed. That is an important role for the Parliament. I am also aware of the possible effect on existing post office staff. We have to have an understanding of why Post Office Ltd proposes to make these changes.

A number of members asked what the precise position is of the post office in a contemporary context—whether it is a public service or a business. The United Kingdom Government has asked Post Office Ltd to operate commercially; critically, it has been asked to do so while also understanding social needs. I do not think that the two objectives are mutually incompatible, although members may take a different philosophical point of view on the matter. Post Office Ltd is a commercially-run company, albeit with the UK Treasury as its sole shareholder. Our scope for intervention is therefore limited. I think that that is widely appreciated across the chamber.

Elaine Smith: Although Post Office Ltd is a commercially run company, I am curious to know whether its own post offices sell alcohol or act as off-licences and whether the minister thinks that it

is acceptable for the post office in Coatbridge to do so.

Allan Wilson: The member made an important and incisive point. She is knowledgeable about the community that she represents. However, it is not for me to defend—or otherwise—the social conscience of Post Office Ltd or the franchise proposition; it is for Post Office Ltd to do that. Some 96 per cent of post office branches are already managed successfully in partnership with individual sub-postmasters or retail companies. I do not know the figures off the top of my head, but I suspect that some—although not all—of them may well engage in the sale of alcohol. It may or may not be appropriate for the post office in Coatbridge to follow suit.

We know that Post Office Ltd has been trying, over the past few years, to turn its business around. Following significant losses in the early 1990s, the business has made much progress. Along with other changes, the introduction of new products such as loans, car insurance, credit cards and a bureau de change service have helped to stop the business sliding deeper into the red. That is important because, notwithstanding the welcome successes, the business's half-year results in November showed a loss of £57 million, compared with a loss of £110 million in the most recent full financial year. All these measures are a part of remedial actions that the company is taking to address those losses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have one minute.

Allan Wilson: I must crave your indulgence, Presiding Officer. The debate is important and involves many important issues. I am sure that members would not mind if I addressed those issues.

A major part of the losses centred on the directly managed network, which is made up of more than 500 branches throughout the UK, 49 of which are in Scotland. It is important that we take on board the Scottish context. The directly managed network accounts for only 4 per cent of Post Office Ltd's operations.

Alasdair Morgan: The problem with which some of us are wrestling is how post offices with eight or 14 counters and a perpetual queue continue to lose money. What is the alternative? If a business's customers are always queuing for more of whatever it provides and it still cannot make money, how can that be turned around? What is the answer?

Allan Wilson: In part, I suppose that the commercial response would refer to franchising, because it increases the footfall, as Elaine Murray and others have said. Standalone branches such as those that exist in the areas that have been

mentioned find it extremely difficult to make a profit to survive—that is the commercial reality. The gist of Post Office Ltd's argument is that those branches will close if action is not taken. If that happened, the potential worst-case scenario involves job losses and no post office service for those who live in the communities concerned. That is the other side of the coin. It is important that the Parliament has a balanced perspective on the issue.

I am not an apologist for Post Office Ltd, but, for the reasons that Bruce Crawford and other members outlined in relation to the social dimension, the Scottish ministers work closely with Post Office Ltd, the Royal Mail Group and others as part of a partnership agreement to ensure recognition of the importance of the availability throughout Scotland of the services that the post office network provides and to ensure that the sort of issues that members have raised are addressed. Post Office Ltd tells us, after 15 years of experience in franchising, that branches that are located in premises of businesses such as CJ Lang—which I understand is a reputable family-owned business—have a greater chance of success and survival than standalone branches have. Post Office Ltd says that, by working with franchise partners such as CJ Lang, it will be able to continue to provide a full range of services, possibly with daily and Saturday opening, to which Bruce Crawford referred. There will be a potential benefit from the shared footfall of customers and from a customer base that would not normally use the post office.

It is worth expressing that argument, as it is the nub of Post Office Ltd's case. It is not necessarily for me to pick holes in that argument, but others may do so. To get to the crux of the issue, members have argued with feeling that the changes might result in poorer service standards for customers. That is an issue for Post Office Ltd and, dare I say it, the consumer watchdog, Postwatch, to consider carefully before the end of the consultation period. I welcome the statement that no compulsory redundancies will take place as a result of the changes, but I accept the concerns that colleagues have expressed ably about the possible impact on existing employees. From a Government perspective, I can only stress that the usual channels of assistance will be available from my department to anyone who faces voluntary redundancy as a consequence of the changes.

On the consultation period, Post Office Ltd has advised that there is a code of conduct—which has been agreed by Postwatch—on informing the public of a directly managed branch conversion. Under the terms of the latest edition of the code of conduct, Post Office Ltd has to allow a six-week period—in this case, a seven-week period—of

public consultation on proposed transfers. Also, under the code of conduct Post Office Ltd is not obliged to consult on the decision to transfer the branch, as that is a commercial decision. However, it has to consult on the details of the services that are to be provided under the franchise. A number of the issues relating to specific local concerns will, I hope, be addressed in that process. In the instance of the six conversions that are currently under consultation in Scotland, the consultation period ends on 31 January.

John Swinburne: Can the minister tell me how many post offices have remained open after consultation?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, you have had five minutes extra. Perhaps you could think about winding up.

Allan Wilson: There is a moratorium on post office closures.

The point that I am trying to make is that there is an opportunity for members and other interested parties, over the course of the next two or three weeks, to make their views known, to impress their concerns on Post Office Ltd and the consumer watchdog and to ensure that those concerns are taken into account by the company and by Postwatch Scotland in the process.

I thank the Presiding Officer for her indulgence. I am sure that all members agree that there are important issues to be addressed. The points that have been made in the debate will be passed on to both Postwatch Scotland and Post Office Ltd. I am sure that the *Official Report* of the debate will be studied very carefully by those two organisations.

Meeting closed at 18:07.

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