

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 1 March 2006

Session 2

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 1 March 2006

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

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Favian Straughan of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, from Portobello Buddhist priory, Edinburgh.

The Rev Favian Straughan (Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, Portobello Buddhist Priory, Edinburgh):

Perhaps we could be forgiven for assuming that a defining characteristic of the human race is its ability to generate conflict around notions of group identity. The other day, I read about experiments using everything from ethnic, political, religious and gender typing to the flip of a coin to divide people into groups, promoting loyalty to that group and a willingness to view others as outsiders and therefore potentially hostile. I have found for myself how easily I slip into an us-or-them mentality when I am watching the news, for example, sure in the knowledge of who the good and the bad are and, of course, of the camp to which I belong.

Buddhism asks us to question the belief that our primary identity is a separate, permanent self, and points to the resulting suffering engendered by that view when situations and encounters in life are viewed as a series of threats and obstacles to be wrestled with and overcome. Buddhism suggests that there is another way of being, which involves a profounder human experience in which the sense of separation dissolves for a while, to be replaced by a deep empathy, rooted in the universals of shared joys, hopes and griefs. Others are in actuality our kith and kin by any definition that goes deeper than a surface look. The more that we let go and open up to that compassionate response, the more the connectedness of life becomes our authentic experience. It is as though we have discovered a capacity to expand the circle of our identity beyond self, family, clan and nation to a sense of our oneness with life itself, and we find that this is where our loyalty and allegiance finally lie.

To approach this way of being must take courage, because it no doubt goes against strong conditioned tendencies to keep that circle small, tight and well defended. First, we need to wake up to the inner patterns that tend towards that

response. That is a risky business, because we are not now simply relying on old categories of thought and feeling to tell us what the reality of this moment is presenting us with. But if we persist in being open and present, risking vulnerability, we have an opportunity truly to meet the situation, and then, through our deep connection, to make wise and compassionate responses.

We do not need tsunamis to illustrate our wonderful capacity to express compassion, nor to be reminded that, ecologically, we sink or swim together. Getting off the bus today, an elderly woman slipped and fell. Two people immediately picked her up, while others gathered her shopping together. There is nothing extraordinary there, yet we are charged with the possibility that, if the human race is to survive at all, it is upon that very instinct for empathy and caring action that our hope rests.

Business Motion

14:34

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-4040, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 1 March 2006—

Wednesday 1 March 2006

after,

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

insert,

followed by Ministerial Statement: Tolled Bridges Review.—[George Lyon.]

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This morning, when I was listening to “Good Morning Scotland” and reading that excellent journal *The Courier* in order to keep abreast of the news, I discovered what turned out to be the precise contents of today’s ministerial statement. It appears that, once again, the Executive has breached the rules that govern the release of information to the Parliament. Given the First Minister’s laughter, it would seem that he thinks that this is a matter for amusement and jocularly. Is that the view of the Presiding Officer? Can any sanction be imposed for the Executive’s serial offending in this fashion?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In response to the point of order, it will be for Parliament to decide whether to revise the business programme in accordance with the motion moved by Mr Lyon.

Fergus Ewing does, however, raise a very serious point that the minister has acknowledged, in that he has written to the Presiding Officer and the business managers pointing out that some aspects of the review have been made public and that he is investigating how that happened.

The Presiding Officers deprecate any discourtesy to the Parliament caused by the release of information in advance of parliamentary proceedings. I judge the information that has been trailed in the press to be significant and that there has been a breach of the guidance on announcements by the Scottish Executive. That is a most unfortunate event.

However, given that the minister has written to the business managers and that he intends to

address the matter in his speech, it would be appropriate for me not to consider the use of any sanction but to allow the statement to proceed. That will be a matter for Parliament in voting on the motion.

Fergus Ewing *rose—*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Since that was a point of order, I am not sure that it would be appropriate for me to call you again, Mr Ewing.

Fergus Ewing: On a further point of order, Presiding Officer. It is not my wish that Parliament should be denied the opportunity to hear the statement now. It seems that some members were not aware that the Minister for Transport and Telecommunications had been good enough to admit that there has been a breach—the First Minister certainly seemed to be unaware of that. We do not wish to deprive Parliament of the opportunity to hear the statement and we want the opportunity to ask questions. For that reason, and that reason alone, we do not propose that the statement should not be heard.

However, I ask again, are there any sanctions at all for those old lags who cannot learn from their previous conduct?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Perhaps it is my fault that I did not make it clear that the sanction would be not to allow the statement to be made; I have already ruled that I will admit the statement, subject to Parliament agreeing to change the order of business. There is no other sanction that I can impose.

The Executive is aware of and will reflect on the point that has been made, and it is covered by the minister’s letter.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 1 March 2006—

Wednesday 1 March 2006

after,

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

insert,

followed by Ministerial Statement: Tolled Bridges Review.

Tolled Bridges Review

14:38

The Minister for Transport and Telecommunications (Tavish Scott): I begin by dealing with the points that have just been raised. I regret that information was placed in the public domain and am as angry as anyone that Parliament has been shown such a discourtesy. I deprecate those leaks, if that is indeed what has happened. It is not in the Government's interests for information to be released to one media outlet, rather than to Parliament and therefore the entire media, on a statement on issues that are so important to so many members across all the political parties in the chamber.

Last Thursday, I asked for an investigation and it is now under way. That is necessary for obvious reasons, but also because such actions undermine the sensible process of government. I want the situation dealt with, and I want it dealt with quickly.

Today, I announce the findings of the tolled bridges review and how we will move forward on the Forth road bridge. In our partnership agreement, we committed to reviewing all the tolled bridges in Scotland. The first phase focused on toll levels and current experience. It found that there would be no adverse environmental impacts from removing the tolls on the Skye bridge, and those tolls were lifted on 21 December 2004.

The second phase focused on principles and management structures. The principles established in the review provide the framework for our decisions. Each bridge has its own unique circumstances, such as different traffic patterns and levels of congestion. We are therefore saying no to a one-size-fits-all approach.

Tolled bridges should not be managed in isolation; they must be integrated with all transport options. There is a strong case for the retention of tolls where they were set up to pay for the provision of a bridge and outstanding costs remain.

Bridge tolls play an important role in addressing congestion. Although in the long term it may be preferable to replace tolls with a national approach to road user charging, in the meantime it is necessary to use them. However, two criteria must be met before tolls are increased. First, where public transport services are already at capacity, visible and necessary improvements must be in place before tolls are increased, in order to provide genuine alternatives for travellers. Secondly, where a tolling regime is required, bridge maintenance is the first priority for

expenditure, and any extra revenue must be invested in local transport improvements.

The Government's key objective for the Forth bridge is to maintain the crossing. Although the construction of the bridge has been paid for, a strong case exists for continued tolling to manage growing demand and meet the high cost of providing a facility of such a scale. The bridge runs at capacity at peak times; the peaks are widening; and approximately 70 per cent of vehicles that cross the bridge contain only their driver. That is unsustainable. Such congestion is bad for motorists, the environment, public transport users and our economy. Removing the tolls would only exacerbate the situation, and the Government is not prepared to countenance taking such action.

I recognise the difficulties that commuters face between Fife and the Lothians. Some have public transport options, whereas others do not. Although there are good public transport links to Edinburgh city centre, only 11 per cent of morning trips from Fife end there. There are greater challenges in providing effective alternatives for the 33 per cent of destinations that are west of the bridgehead or the 25 per cent of destinations in west Edinburgh.

Much is already planned to assist travellers. The Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine rail project and the redevelopment of Waverley station will give extra capacity between Edinburgh and Fife, providing at least an extra 800 train seats per hour in 2008. The bus route development grant has provided funding for services between Inverkeithing railway station, via Ferrytoll, to Edinburgh. Funding has been provided for bus station enhancements in Fife and, this summer, for the Markinch integrated rail and bus interchange. The A8000 upgrade, which the Executive supports, will be completed by early 2008. Before any toll increase is introduced on the Forth bridge, travellers need to see the completion of visible improvements such as those.

We have, therefore, rejected the Forth Estuary Transport Authority's application. We want to concentrate on taking a strategic approach to improving all public transport in the region. That work will be led by the Government and Transport Scotland, working alongside FETA, local authorities and the regional transport partnerships.

The issue of most concern is cable corrosion on the Forth bridge. We have considered the findings of the independent technical audit of FETA's analysis. Although there are no immediate safety concerns about the bridge, there are two potential long-term problems. If the corrosion cannot be slowed or halted, the bridge may have to be closed to heavy goods vehicles at some point between 2013 and 2018 and to cars at some point between 2019 and 2024. The experts cannot be more categorical about the dates because it is not

an exact science. That is the risk as they judge it now.

FETA is instructing further work: the fitting of acoustic monitoring on the bridge cable; a feasibility study into dehumidification to slow or halt the corrosion, although if that system is fitted the results may not be known for several years; and a study into strengthening or replacing the cable, which is due for completion around the summer 2007.

The most optimistic timeframe for replacing the crossing is around 2014—if the work starts now. It is prudent, therefore, to start the planning now. However, such planning may prove unnecessary if methods are found to safeguard the existing bridge with more certainty.

Starting preparatory work does not commit us to constructing a new crossing. Given the evidence, however, it is essential to start preparations in case the bridge needs to be replaced. That will ensure that if a new crossing is needed, time will not be lost waiting for the results of relevant studies. Transport Scotland will take the work forward as part of the strategic projects review. The role of any replacement crossing will be properly considered in light of the national transport strategy.

Due process must be followed. I am, therefore, unable to say what the design of a replacement crossing would be, how much it would cost or how it would be funded. Those issues will be examined as the work proceeds, and environmental considerations will be a critical part of that analysis.

The bridges review was also about the Firth of Tay and the Clyde. The Tay bridge joint board owns and operates the Tay bridge, and 65 per cent of trips on the bridge are made by local traffic. The capital costs of the bridge have not yet been repaid, and its tolls play a role in demand management. There are congestion problems at peak times, and the Dundee City Council area is to be an air quality management area. Bridge traffic contributes to those problems, which would be worse without tolls.

The board needs to upgrade the bridge's tolling facilities and is considering moving the toll plaza to the south side, to help to ease Dundee's air quality problems. Importantly, it must consider its role in the Dundee central waterfront development. The development will create a sense of dramatic arrival for travellers entering the city, and the bridge must play a key part in that regeneration. However, the board has no powers beyond maintaining and operating the bridge. We have, therefore, decided that tolls should remain and that the board should be given more flexibility to deal with transport issues in its vicinity.

I turn to the Erskine bridge. The construction costs of the bridge have been met, although there are on-going maintenance requirements. Removing the tolls would ease congestion, particularly through the Clyde tunnel and on the Clydeside expressway. Glasgow City Council has declared an air quality management area covering the city centre. The predicted reductions in traffic as a result of removing the tolls would have a beneficial impact on air quality.

I am pleased to announce that, in the light of those benefits, tolls will come to end on the Erskine bridge on 31 March. However, it is essential that we prevent the new space on the road from filling up with new traffic. I will be looking to Glasgow City Council and the regional transport partnerships to commit to and to implement measures that lock in the benefits of toll removal. Although I understand that ending the tolls will be widely supported, I am aware of the difficulties that that may cause to toll collection staff. Support will be provided by the Renfrewshire local response team, as part of the Executive's partnership action for continuing employment framework, if required.

We must be decisive and we must act now. We will plan a replacement crossing, if one is needed, to maintain the links between Fife and the Lothians. We reject FETA's £4 tolls. We will abolish the Erskine bridge tolls, because that is right for the environment and the local economy. We will help the Tay bridge joint board to deliver for Dundee's regeneration.

We are taking a principled and consistent approach to Scotland's bridges. It is a fair approach and it is the right approach. I commend it to Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The minister will now take questions on his statement for about 20 minutes. Many members' names are already on screen. I ask for brevity in the questions.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): For much of the past six years in the Parliament, I have consistently argued that Scotland's road users have been fleeced. I am delighted that at long last the Executive has admitted that that is so, by taking action to scrap the tolls on the Erskine bridge. However, can the minister explain as a point of principle why the three bridges should be treated differently from roads, given that, without a shadow of a doubt, each of them is part of the national road network? People in Scotland do not pay for using a particular road, so why should they be penalised for where they live or work and be required to pay tolls on two, but not three, of the bridges? If he has scrapped tolls for one bridge, how can he argue consistently that they should remain on the other two? We now know that people in Fife will

continue to pay, while people in Faifley will not. People in Dunfermline will pay, but people in Dumbarton will not. People in Kilmacoll will pay, but people in Kirkcaldy will not—or vice versa. *[Laughter.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is why I recommend brevity, Mr Ewing.

Fergus Ewing: I always knew that I should listen to you more, Presiding Officer. Can we add to the West Lothian question in Scotland the Kirkcaldy conundrum?

Can the minister explain why he now says that he has agreed that we must start work on a replacement crossing today? On 17 November, my colleague Tricia Marwick suggested to the First Minister that

“the work on the case for a new Forth crossing”

must begin now. The First Minister responded that

“That is a particularly daft suggestion and we will not take it up.”—*[Official Report, 17 November 2005; c 20862.]*

Why has the Executive taken up the suggestion today?

Finally—

Members: Oh!

Fergus Ewing: I do not want to disappoint members, but finally—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Quickly, Mr Ewing.

Fergus Ewing: On the important technical aspects, which Alastair Andrew explained to me and my colleagues last week, when will the Executive be in a position to make a final decision? It has been suggested to us that the reports to which the minister referred on corrosion and dehumidification may not in fact be ready until 2013—the year before HGVs will not be able to cross the Forth.

Tavish Scott: I will deal with the points in reverse order.

First, on the replacement bridge and the studies that FETA is taking forward, it is important to recognise the timescale that I laid out in my statement for when those studies will happen and when they will provide the information that is needed. The suggestion that, in November, we should have immediately commissioned, configured and announced sizeable amounts of public money for work on the case for a new bridge—as Mr Ewing has just suggested—without carrying out an independent audit of the analysis and work already done shows a breathtaking lack of understanding of anything about government and a breathtaking contempt for taxpayers' money. It was the right decision to employ the Flint

and Neill Partnership to provide an independent audit of the initial findings to make the analysis complete. That independent work has meant that we could announce, as we have done today, that we will begin the process for having a second crossing—if it is needed—following the completion of the studies.

I got a bit lost during Mr Ewing's first question, as he could not decide which part of the country he was in. Perhaps he should stick to making points of order, because he is sounder on those than he is on making logical arguments.

I noticed that there was no mention of the environment or congestion in Mr Ewing's comments. That shows the position of the Scottish National Party today.

Mr David Davidson (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank the minister for providing us with a copy of his statement, which is remarkably similar to the leaks that we have read.

I welcome the U-turn and the inconsistency—or rather, I do not welcome the inconsistency, but I welcome the U-turn—whereby the minister has accepted Conservative policy by removing the threat of congestion charges on the Forth bridge and starting preparatory work to consider a new Forth crossing.

Under the current system, FETA has to pay for the A8000; I presume that some of its funding proposals were related to that road. Will the Executive fund the A8000? Will the A8000 be a trunk road?

If there are to be no congestion charges on the Forth bridge, why should there be congestion charges on the Tay bridge? By the minister's own admission, the Tay and Erskine bridges deal mainly with local traffic, so why is he discriminating against the users of the Tay bridge, when in his statement he talked about the regeneration of Dundee?

Tavish Scott: The Conservatives do not appear to understand the point that I explained clearly in my statement about how different arrangements, different amounts of congestion and different levels of car and HGV use on different bridges have to be dealt with by making an impartial and consistent assessment across the bridges network. That is what the tolled bridges review did.

Neither the Tories nor the SNP contributed—as they were invited to—to any part of the review. When it comes to consistency, the one thing that the Tories and the SNP are consistent about is that they put forward no views at any time on the issues. *[Interruption.]* No—the SNP did not contribute to the review.

The one answer that I can give to Mr Davidson is that we will continue discussions on the A8000.

We expect FETA to continue to play a role in that project and we will sort out the discussions on the funding of the road.

Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab): I say for the record that I am bitterly disappointed that today's statement indicates that the tolls will be lifted from the Erskine bridge but will remain on the Forth and Tay bridges. That is totally unfair and it is unacceptable to those of us who come from Fife.

Turning to what the minister said about a replacement crossing at Queensferry, I welcome the intention to start the planning for that, which is what I called for in my members' business debate last November. However, given that, according to the minister, at peak times 89 per cent of the traffic is not heading into Edinburgh city centre, does he agree that just improving public transport links with Edinburgh city centre is not the answer to the Forth bridge's current problems? Do I have an assurance from him that any new crossing designed for the Forth would have greater capacity than that of the current bridge, which is now two times over its capacity?

Tavish Scott: I will certainly look into the issues that Mr Barrie raises with regard to the capacity of any future crossing, if we need it. We will of course do that as part of the on-going work on the strategic projects review, which has already begun. It will be important to consider those issues.

I take his point about the destination of the traffic that crosses the bridge, which was one of the issues that I addressed in my statement. We need to consider that, which is why our work on transport and the on-going assessment of different types of public transport provision are important.

The two issues that Mr Barrie and many other members from Fife have raised consistently with me over the past couple of months—he also raised them in his members' business debate—are FETA's £4 proposal and the need to start work on a new crossing, if that is necessary. We have rejected the FETA proposal, but we have started work on the new crossing. Some of us have to be responsible and take credit at the same time.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): First, I welcome the commonsense approach that the minister has taken in relation to the Forth crossing by rejecting FETA's £4 proposal and starting sensible planning now for a replacement bridge, should that be necessary. Can he assure me that he reached that decision without the benefit of Mr Brown's or Mr Darling's input?

The Tay bridge affects my constituents more directly. We pay about £2 million a year in tolls on the Tay bridge for a bridge that cost less than £5 million to build nearly 40 years ago. Can the

position on the Tay bridge tolls be kept under review? I think that the case has now been made for those tolls to be removed. On the proposal to move the toll plaza, will an environmental assessment be undertaken to find out whether removing the tolls completely would have the same environmental benefits for Dundee as moving the toll plaza, which will cause problems in my constituency of North East Fife?

Tavish Scott: I can certainly give Mr Smith the assurance that any proposals to move the toll plaza to the south of the Tay bridge would have to meet planning requirements, which would include an environmental assessment, and deal with air quality and congestion issues or build-ups of traffic that relate to the plaza. Those would be carefully considered as part of the assessment. I hear his views on the Tay bridge, which no doubt others share. All that I can say is that we have had a lengthy process that involved the tolled bridges review, and, as I stated in Parliament this afternoon, the position is that the review has concluded. It is tempting for me to comment on statements made by others in recent weeks, but I will perhaps not do that today.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Five Labour colleagues—Trish Godman, Hugh Henry, Jackie Baillie, Wendy Alexander and me—have all been involved in the campaign for the removal of the tolls on the Erskine bridge, as have Andy White and Jim Harkins, who are the leaders of the two relevant councils. The minister's decision will be warmly welcomed in West Dunbartonshire and Renfrewshire. The argument that clinched the removal of the tolls is that doing so will relieve congestion in the Clyde tunnel and on the Erskine bridge. However, does the minister agree that the benefits can be fully achieved only if the links between the various bridges on the north side of the Clyde are upgraded? In that context, will he consider whether Parliament can be asked later this year to include the north Clydeside development route in the next round of strategic transport projects?

Tavish Scott: There is an opportunity to consider all those issues in the regional transport partnership work that is on-going in areas with which Mr McNulty is familiar and in the strategic projects review, which will be based on a corridor-by-corridor assessment. I am sure that if there are arguments of strategic importance, they can be placed in the context of the strategic projects review. If the arguments are predominantly more regional and local, I am sure that it would be appropriate to take the projects concerned forward through the regional transport partnership work.

Shiona Baird (North East Scotland) (Green): I am disappointed with the message that is being sent out today. Dropping tolls on the Erskine

bridge and rejecting smart tolls on the Forth bridge will encourage greater car use. Does the minister support the principle of variable tolls to reduce congestion?

Tavish Scott: Variable tolls have a part to play in the future.

Members: Ah!

Tavish Scott: However, as I said in my statement, there are two important qualifications. First, improvements in public transport are required so that people have alternatives. The Tories may not think that that is a good idea, but most of the rest of us think that it is. Secondly, moneys raised from tolls must be used primarily for maintenance and then for improvements in public transport.

In the longer term, it seems more equitable to move towards a system based on road user charging across the trunk road network as a whole. I see that developing over the years to come.

Colin Fox (Lothians) (SSP): I wonder whether the Minister for Transport and Telecommunications agrees that the public will be bemused and bewildered by the inconsistencies in his statement today and by the political shenanigans of Labour and Liberal politicians over this matter in the past few weeks.

The minister announced the abolition of the Erskine bridge, having previously—

Members: The tolls!

Colin Fox: Yes, the abolition of tolls on the Erskine bridge—although he will probably get to abolishing the bridge next week.

He announced the abolition of tolls on the Erskine bridge, having previously abolished them on the Skye bridge, but we are to keep tolls on the Forth bridge and the Tay bridge. Even his reasons are inconsistent. He says that the tolls are to pay for existing bridges, when some of them have already been paid for. He also says that the tolls are to pay for repairs, to deter congestion and to improve air quality. Would not the correct approach be to accept that the bridges are part of our economic and transport infrastructure, and are therefore the responsibility of Government? Is it not, therefore, appropriate to abolish all the tolls on all the bridges?

I will finish with a point about congestion. Is not the way to reduce traffic volumes to provide alternatives to the car by investing in and encouraging people to use quality modern public transport alternatives; to get freight on to rail; and to have dedicated multi-occupancy lanes on our motorways? Those measures would be incentives to reduce traffic volumes.

Tavish Scott: Mr Fox probably made a number of sensible points about congestion in the latter half of his question, but the first half reeked of someone having written it long before listening to the statement.

We have set out principles in relation to bridges for which the capital costs have been paid off—that means the Erskine bridge but not the Tay bridge. That is the position.

Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab): I welcome the announcement on funding for the long-delayed improvements at Markinch. However, I share the bitter disappointment of Scott Barrie and others that the only place in Scotland where tolls are to be retained is the kingdom of Fife. I am not convinced by the intellectual rigour of an argument that says that the removal of tolls in the west of Scotland will reduce congestion, and then says that tolls in the east of Scotland must be retained. The economy of Fife and of my constituency will be at an even greater disadvantage than hitherto, and my constituents will be even further penalised. Has the minister carried out any research into the impact of his measures on the economy of Fife, and central Fife in particular? If he has, will he share the results with us? If he has not, will he commit to carrying out such research urgently, and to reporting back on the findings?

Tavish Scott: Christine Grahame should know, because she—

Members: May!

Tavish Scott: Christine May. I apologise. Gosh—a big apology.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): How ungallant.

Tavish Scott: I would apologise to anyone whose name I got wrong.

Christine May sent me many of the reports that followed FETA's proposal for a £4 toll. One report came from the Federation of Small Businesses; others came from different business organisations. All those reports included a significant amount of economic and financial data, which were part of the evidence that we considered when we appraised the application in principle from FETA's board. I hope that Christine May acknowledges that not only did we consider the data, but we acted on them as well.

I think that Christine May argues for the complete abolition of tolls on the Forth bridge, but I cannot agree with her. As a Fife MSP, she knows the congestion issues. All the traffic modelling conducted by independent analysts—which is in the public domain, because it has been published as part of the review—suggests that congestion would simply get worse if the tolls were abolished. She will also know that costs to businesses and

individual travellers rise when congestion gets worse. I am sure that none of us wants that to happen.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I welcome the minister's decision to remove the tolls from the Erskine bridge and to begin planning for a new bridge across the Forth. However, I am utterly bewildered by the lack of cohesion and strategy in the Liberal transport minister's thinking. He told us that the tolls on the Erskine bridge are being removed because the debt has been paid, but the debt has been paid on the Forth bridge, and there was plenty of debt left to be paid on the Skye bridge. What does that say about strategic thinking and cohesion? Does the minister not realise that from today he will always be known as the minister who left the users of the Tay and Forth bridges as the only people in Scotland who must continue to pay the toll tax? Does he not understand or care that people in Fife will be furious about the fact that tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges will remain when those on the Erskine and Skye bridges have been removed? That is unfair, and it is blatant discrimination.

Finally—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Quickly.

Bruce Crawford: This is an important point. With the removal of the tolls on the Erskine bridge, I understand that an extra £20 million will require to be provided to strengthen the bridge because of the additional number of HGVs that it is expected will be driven across it. Does the minister know about that? When will that money be spent, and what programme will it come from?

Tavish Scott: The work on the Erskine bridge is already under way. The studies have been done, the financial assessment has been made, and the proposed work has been budgeted for, so although Mr Crawford's observation is interesting, it is somewhat late.

Let us consider the consistency of the Scottish National Party. In an SNP press release dated 18 January, Nicola Sturgeon said that any increase in the tolls on the Forth bridge would be unacceptable. She stated:

"The SNP says loud and clear £1 is enough."

Is that consistent enough for Mr Crawford?

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Given the uncertainty about the future of the Forth bridge crossing, I can just about understand the minister's logic in treating it as a different case, but as both the Erskine bridge and the Tay bridge carry predominantly local traffic, what possible justification can there be for scrapping tolls on one and not on the other? We are surely talking about a political fix, whereby the Liberal Democrats get the tolls on the Skye bridge lifted, Labour in the

west of Scotland gets the tolls on the Erskine bridge lifted, but the Executive treats with contempt the people of Tayside and Fife.

Tavish Scott: I expected that from Mr Fraser, because that is his standard line. He obviously was not listening. No matter how many times I say it, the Tories will never listen. I said clearly that the debt relating to the Erskine bridge has been paid off because the construction costs have been paid off.

Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): What about the Skye bridge?

Tavish Scott: Let us talk to the Tories about the Skye bridge. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order. A question has been asked and is being answered. Members must not shout supplementary questions from the benches, and the minister should not be distracted by them, either.

Tavish Scott: Yes, Presiding Officer, but, believe me, I am more than happy to be distracted on the subject of the Skye bridge and the Tories' record on tolls in the Highlands.

Murdo Fraser and the Tories are not interested in the argument about air quality improvements, which is an important consideration. Removing the tolls on the Erskine bridge will help to improve air quality in Glasgow and will lock in benefits for Glasgow and the surrounding area by reducing congestion. That argument is profoundly important, but the Tories dismiss it.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): I hope that the minister will forgive me if I do not enter into the unseemly squabble about who pays tolls and who does not. We all know why some folk are paying them and some folk are not.

Let us consider the part of the minister's statement that leaves an unanswered question. He said that he did not know how the proposed new crossing would be funded. I can understand his not knowing what it would cost to build a replacement bridge, but I would like to find out how it would be funded, given what is happening to the Barnett formula. In addition, I want to know more about the timescale, given what we know will happen to the labour supply because of the London Olympics in 2012.

Tavish Scott: Those are important and serious questions on funding. I cannot tell Margo MacDonald today how the crossing—if it is needed—will be funded. Work on that will be progressed by the Finance and Central Services Department of Government in the next year or so. If the Government needs to make a decision on a new crossing, it will be important for the ministers of the day to be able to tell Parliament and others exactly how it will be funded.

Margo MacDonald is right about the importance of the timescales and of ensuring that decisions are taken to secure the crossing. I have said that that is what we will do, which is why the planning starts now.

I take Margo MacDonald's point about the pressure on the construction industry. That impacts not only on the potential construction of a new crossing, but on the Executive's overall capital programme.

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): I thank the minister for the announcement about the Erskine bridge. I associate myself with my colleague Des McNulty's comments. However, can the minister assure me that the pleasant and courteous men and women who collect the tolls will be involved immediately with the appropriate agencies and officials who will assist them in finding new employment with good terms and conditions?

Tavish Scott: I hope that those men and women can be provided with alternative employment within the company that operates the tolling regime. Indeed, I understand that that is one of the options. For any members of staff who do not want to or cannot be part of that option, work is under way through the local enterprise company, the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department and our initiatives to help individuals who unfortunately lose their job.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): Given the concerns about the A8000, the state of the Forth road bridge, the environmental impact of a second bridge, and the importance of maintaining the Forth crossing, I welcome today's announcement, and the Executive's recognition of the need to do preparatory work on a second crossing without committing to its construction.

Will the minister give further details of the range of the preparatory work, confirm that all options—including a tunnel—will be looked at and say what FETA's role will be in the decision-making process on the existing bridge's future and on any replacement or second crossing?

Tavish Scott: I suspect that FETA's role will be to continue strongly with the current maintenance work on the existing bridge. FETA initiated the studies that I described earlier, and the Executive will want to look at them. FETA has an important role in ensuring that the studies come to fruition and that assessment is carried out as efficiently and quickly as possible.

In the longer term, the matters under discussion will be considered over the next year. We will take advice on the construction of a potential new crossing and on the implications for organisations, such as FETA or Transport Scotland. I assure Margaret Smith that no future crossing option—if

such a crossing is necessary—will be ruled out. That is the nature of the initial work that Transport Scotland will undertake under the strategic projects review.

Kate Maclean (Dundee West) (Lab): The minister stated that two of the significant factors that were taken into account when the Executive considered the removal of tolls from the Erskine bridge were congestion reduction and air quality improvement. I predicate my question on the fact that I know far more about what happens in the city centre of Dundee than he does. Traffic congestion in the evening is caused almost entirely by traffic queuing to pay the Tay bridge tolls. It is ridiculous that tolls have been left on the Tay bridge when they have been removed from other bridges on the basis that doing so will reduce congestion and improve air quality. Will the minister explain to my constituents the logic behind his statement?

Tavish Scott: The logic was laid out in the statement—it relates to paying off the capital costs and redeeming the debt.

I take Kate Maclean's point. I would be surprised if she did not know more about the traffic in the centre of Dundee than I do. That said, the traffic modelling indicated that if we were to remove the tolls at one fell swoop, congestion in the centre of Dundee would worsen. I can go only on the evidence that is presented to me. The bridges review was undertaken to assess all the information and evidence. In addition, the Tay road bridge joint board is considering options for the location of the toll plaza.

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Either the minister's statement was one of the most illogical that a member of the Liberal-Labour Executive in the Scottish Parliament has ever made, or the Executive thinks that the people of Fife are stupid.

Nicola Sturgeon has made her position quite clear in her comments to ministers. If tolls are to be removed from the Erskine bridge, they should also be removed from the Forth and Tay bridges. Will the minister explain the logic behind the decision to abolish tolls on the Erskine bridge because there are road alternatives in that location, while retaining tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges where there are no road alternatives? Will he explain how the A8000 upgrade will be funded and completed by 2008, given that he made it clear to FETA that an offer of Executive grant for 2006-07 and 2007-08 would depend on a road user charging scheme being in place? No such scheme is in place. Finally, the Markinch interchange was promised to the commuters of Markinch—including me—in 2000. What guarantee can he give us that the work will start this year?

Tavish Scott: Work on the Markinch interchange will start this summer. That is our information, and I hope that Tricia Marwick accepts that assurance. I want the work to begin—as do many people, particularly commuters—because it represents an important part of the public transport links that we want to improve. That reflects the reasons behind our decisions. The analysis of the bridges review was predicated on consideration of how we put in place public transport improvements and of how we ensure that people have travel choices. The best way of ensuring that we achieve those objectives is by proceeding in the way that I have set out.

If we simply abolish tolls, which appears to be a new SNP policy—[*Interruption.*] It was not SNP policy when the party issued its press release on 18 January. All traffic modelling shows that if we were to abolish tolls, congestion would rise and rise. I suggest to the SNP, as cheerfully and positively as I can, that that would not be a sensible way forward.

In the longer term, road user charging must be considered in the context of the strategic roads network. That approach might well provide a better solution. However, at this stage we cannot create worse bottlenecks than the ones we have, which appears to be SNP policy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that I cannot call every member who wants to ask a question. I have allowed questions on the statement to run 10 minutes over time. Helen Eadie will ask the final question.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): The northern end of the Forth road bridge is in my constituency, so I welcome the opportunity to ask a question. Two weeks ago, the minister announced air fare subsidies for travellers to the northern islands, which in effect provides a bridge in the air. I thought that that policy was an attempt to achieve social and economic justice. What is the minister's response to my constituents in Fife, who can find no social or economic justice in the approach that he has taken, which ensures that they will continue to pay tolls? On my constituents' behalf I say that the situation is outrageous. I also say to the minister that public perception—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please do not say anything to the minister; ask him a question.

Helen Eadie: Will the minister confirm that the previous Minister for Transport wrote to FETA last autumn requiring it to develop proposals for punitive congestion charging?

Tavish Scott: Helen Eadie made representations to me about the FETA proposal for tolls of £4 and about the need to start—[*Interruption.*] May I finish? I was asked about the

need to start the crossing, if that proves to be necessary—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Tavish Scott: I inform Helen Eadie that the approach that I described in my statement reflects a collective Cabinet decision—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

I repeat my apology to the members who want to ask a question. We must move on to the next item of business.

Regeneration

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-4024, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on regeneration in Scotland—people and place. I advise members that the implication of the overrun on the statement by the Minister for Transport and Telecommunications is that I must reduce the time for speeches in the open debate from six minutes to four minutes. I regret the inconvenience to the members who will be affected by that.

15:20

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm): I begin by setting the Executive's "People and Place: Regeneration Policy Statement" in its broader context. To improve the fabric of our country, since devolution, we have invested massively in enterprise, jobs, housing and transport and in combating poverty and deprivation. For example, Scotland's employment rate is now among the best in Europe; we have spent more than £4 billion on good-quality housing for Scotland's people; and we have reduced dramatically the number of Scottish children and pensioners who live in poverty.

We have also set out clear policies, for example on our support for economic development, in the refreshed version of "A Smart, Successful Scotland"; on our future investment in infrastructure, in the infrastructure investment plan; and on action to turn round the most deprived communities, in our community regeneration statement of 2002, which paved the way for our integrated community regeneration fund, with its strategic approach that focuses on outcomes. That is a strong foundation for future wider regeneration policy.

Despite all that work, we felt that the time had come to take stock of how our funding, policies and action across a range of portfolios work together to support regeneration. We asked whether we needed to do more and do better. "People and Place" is the result of that. Before I turn to the content of the statement, I will say a few words about the fundamental principles that underlie our approach. First, as the title suggests, regeneration is about people and place: it is about realising the opportunities that places offer for the benefit of people who live and work there and about capitalising on our assets and making them work for the good of the economy and local communities. It is about linking opportunity and need. Our aim is to grow the economy—our number 1 task—but also to tackle the poverty and disadvantage that still hold back too many of our communities. Regeneration has a clear economic

rationale, but it also has a compelling moral purpose.

Secondly, regeneration is not about having a prescribed list of actions; it is about outcomes, such as increased economic activity and employment, higher incomes, a higher skills base, increased community confidence and improved quality of life. Thirdly, regeneration needs partnership between the public and private sectors, local authorities and central Government and agencies and communities, but it also needs clarity of purpose and leadership.

At local level, where regeneration really takes place, local authorities have a key role. At national level, we are determined to play a wider and more ambitious leadership role. We want to raise our game, which we will do by bringing together private and public sector players to maximise the impact of their activities and resources; by acting as a catalyst for private sector activity and investment; by ensuring a genuinely joined-up approach across the Executive to remove barriers to action; by tackling the land and property issues that can hold back regeneration; and by using a range of policy measures to create mixed and vibrant communities throughout Scotland. By doing so, we will show that Scotland is open for business.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Will those mixed and vibrant communities include rural communities? In the foreword to the statement, the minister mentions growing urban communities and cities and regenerating former coalfield areas. Can we assume that more idyllic communities such as those in the Highlands and Islands will also be addressed?

Malcolm Chisholm: Mary Scanlon is right to assume that.

Part of the leadership role to which we aspire is to be clear about our priorities, because, while we want to be ambitious, we need to be realistic. We cannot aspire to engage everywhere to the same level at the same time. We have to prioritise on the basis of economic opportunity, community need, and the state of activity on the ground, which is why our statement identifies three key geographic priorities for the immediate future.

Our national priority is the Clyde corridor, including the areas that are covered by the Clyde gateway and Clyde waterfront regeneration initiatives. Glasgow has seen strong economic growth in the past decade and parts of the city are undergoing a remarkable physical transformation that is led by major investment in housing. However, the long-term decline of traditional industries has left a legacy of underused assets and there is a concentration of Scotland's most deprived communities, in which social exclusion,

economic inactivity and physical dereliction and decay have been long-standing problems.

Our regional priorities are Inverclyde and Ayrshire. Both areas have suffered from long-standing problems of industrial decline, deprivation and depopulation, but they have great assets, such as good transport connections, high-quality natural environments, a strong cultural heritage and increasing property markets. Both areas have the potential to become better and more integrated into the Glasgow city region and the wider economy of the central belt.

In each of those priority areas, the Executive and all our agencies will work together to intensify our activity in support of regeneration.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I thank the minister for his visit to North Ayrshire yesterday and his announcement on the regeneration package, which has been warmly welcomed by my constituents. Does he agree that in order for stakeholders to have confidence in the future of the project, they must know that funding will be available in future years? Can he give an assurance today that the Scottish Executive is in this for the long term?

Malcolm Chisholm: I was just about to talk about our support in North Ayrshire; as Irene Oldfather has intervened, I shall begin with that. We will support a pathfinder urban regeneration company to regenerate the area around Irvine bay, which I was pleased to visit yesterday. The start-up costs have been announced and when the business plan is produced, further funding will be forthcoming. In Inverclyde, which I was pleased also to visit yesterday, we will support a pathfinder urban regeneration company. The same details will apply there as those that I have just described for North Ayrshire.

In the Clyde corridor, we will step up our engagement with Glasgow City Council and its partners to deliver the regeneration of the Clyde gateway and waterfront, including working to establish an urban regeneration company to drive forward the gateway initiative. The Executive and its agencies will provide additional support—financial and other—for all three of those initiatives. We will seek to prioritise investment throughout all Executive portfolios in support of the regeneration of those geographic areas.

This is partly about money but, more important, it is about changing the way in which we work; it is about ensuring a joined-up approach throughout Executive departments and agencies, at the centre and on the ground, in support of local action; it is about opening doors for others; it is about being proactive and outward looking; and it is about engaging more effectively with public and private sector players. It is about working better

and smarter to support regeneration wherever it takes place. We will focus particularly intensively on our priority areas, and we will follow that new approach in our activity throughout Scotland.

There is no question of a lessening of our existing commitment to supporting local government and its partners in other parts of the country. Through the community regeneration fund, we will continue to support targeted action to help the most deprived neighbourhoods throughout the country. We will continue to support business development throughout Scotland; critically, through all our departments and agencies, through the regeneration outcome agreement process, through our support for skills and employability training and through a range of other action, we will work to ensure that effective action is taken to link economic development to community need. Communities Scotland and the enterprise networks have particularly vital and complementary roles to play in all that work. They will work hand in hand to promote and encourage regeneration initiatives at local and regional level.

I shall touch on two critical areas: land and property, and creating mixed and vibrant communities. We know from past experience that investment in bricks and mortar alone is not enough for lasting regeneration, but developing land and property can bring new industrial, commercial and residential development and new opportunities for employment and economic growth. The private sector is and must be at the forefront of such development, but the public sector has a key role in oiling the wheels and making it easier for others to realise the potential of particular locations. Our planning reforms will make planning more responsive to regeneration opportunities and provide greater clarity and certainty for the private sector. That will complement our investment in tackling the problems of contaminated land throughout Scotland and the worst concentrations of vacant and derelict land. Over the three years to 2008, we are providing £20 million to local authorities to help them address the problems of contaminated land. That is in addition to the £24 million that was provided over the previous five years.

Moreover, we have already provided £20 million to Glasgow City Council, Dundee City Council and North Lanarkshire Council—the authorities with the most significant problems—to deal with concentrations of vacant and derelict land that can hinder redevelopment and regeneration. Yesterday, I announced a further £24 million for those three council areas and for South Lanarkshire.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): In terms of joined-up government, does the minister agree that what the document contains about the

acquisition of strategic land flies in the face of what is happening with Scottish Enterprise, which is currently holding an auction of strategic land sites that some people say borders on a land fire sale?

Malcolm Chisholm: I am sure that Nicol Stephen will address the issue of Scottish Enterprise in his winding-up speech. However, one of the key features of the regeneration statement is that Scottish Enterprise and the local enterprise companies will be signed up to the regeneration priorities that we have outlined today.

I do not have time to say all that I wanted to say about creating mixed and vibrant communities. However, I can say that a key role of regeneration is to do precisely that. We want communities that have a mix of housing and a mix of income; that are great places in which to live and invest; that are strong and safe and have a sense of place and identity; that provide opportunities for sport, leisure and cultural activities for all ages; and in which there are different housing choices and public and private sector services that serve people's needs. Obviously, our £1.2 billion investment in new housing over the three years is relevant to that, as are issues such as good architecture and design, which will be the subject of tomorrow's debate.

A detailed action plan will be drawn up soon and I believe that we need to draw on the experience and expertise of those on the front line. That is why I will establish and chair an informal sounding board of high-level players from the private and public sectors to advise us as we develop and refine our approach.

The statement that we are publishing today is just the start of the process. However, we are absolutely committed to the approach that we have outlined. We hope and believe that it will result in lasting change for Scotland. We have raised the stakes and we are determined to deliver.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the Scottish Executive's statement "People and Place: Regeneration Policy in Scotland"; notes the current support for the regeneration of communities across Scotland; supports the commitment from the Executive and its agencies to work with local authorities and other partners to ensure that communities benefit from economic activity and to attract further investment from the private sector, and welcomes the Executive's determination to tackle those land, property and other issues that can act as a barrier to regeneration and to create successful, mixed and vibrant communities.

15:31

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I am minded to ask whether, after the little

stramash that we have witnessed, the coalition is off to regenerate in some dark corner.

I have a few preliminary comments to make with regard to the document. I advise the minister that it is not sufficient to intimate to my colleagues only 24 hours before a document is launched that it will be launched. That practice is becoming more prevalent and should be completely discouraged. The practice of issuing policy documents only 24 hours before a debate is unacceptable and makes a farce of any commitment from the coalition to open, accountable and transparent government. Given our other commitments, 24 hours is not sufficient time for us to consider a document.

Either it is my imagination or the Executive's documents are getting glossier. Today's document contains lots of shiny pictures that pad out the text and, frankly, one loses the will to continue to page 64. Buried in the document, however, are some unfortunate gems. The document praises Glasgow Housing Association, which has told the Executive that it is short of millions of pounds that it needs to devolve its functions downwards. It praises Scottish Borders Housing Association, which is suing Scottish Borders Council because, it claims, it was overcharged on the sale of houses. It praises Scottish Water, whose chairman has just resigned, saying that he cannot meet the Executive's targets. On top of all that, the document maintains a commitment to keeping the right to buy, despite evidence from many housing providers that that policy must end. I mention those points to let the minister know that I have actually read the document.

What of the cost of the document? Heaven knows. By the middle of last year, the Executive had spent £7 million on producing such documents, but when I ask parliamentary questions to find out who reads them and distributes them, it cannot tell me because it does not know.

There has been a gestation period of two years since the setting up of a working group and, after seven years of Labour and the Liberal Democrats being in power, they are now taking stock. I think that they are looking at the failure of the past seven years. I know that because I read in *The Herald* that the plan comes two years after the First Minister was warned by business leaders that some of Scotland's poorest communities were being hobbled by bureaucratic confusion—I was here when he was told that. Further, a Scottish Executive spokesperson says:

"Through the 1990s, there was big progress and England jumped ahead of us on this. This is us getting our act together."

What has the Executive been doing for the past seven years? The spokesperson continues:

"Ministers are keen to be sharper, more innovative and fleet of foot."

I say to Malcolm Chisholm that I cannot bear the sight of it. Fleet of foot? If I were being charitable, I would say that it was better late than never. However, it is not my job to be charitable with regard to the failures of those who are sitting opposite me.

Millions of pounds have been poured into schemes, yet the deprived remain deprived. One in four children in Scotland still lives in poverty. The Executive is not on course to meet its target to eradicate child poverty by 2020. One in five pensioners lives in poverty but, of course, there is no target for that. Tens of thousands of young people are not in education, employment or training and some 39,000 manufacturing jobs were lost to Scotland in the first three years of the Liberal and Labour coalition. In 2003, a report by Cardiff University said that manufacturing in Scotland was in meltdown.

In place, we have the ubiquitous call centre jobs, which offer low pay, no job security and no prospects. The many part-time jobs mask the actual unemployment rate.

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: In a moment. Low pay and—

Mr McNeil: The member insulted many of my constituents.

Christine Grahame: I did not insult the member's constituents. I have constituents who work in call centres and they tell me these things.

Mr McNeil: The member insulted the many people in my constituency who work in call centres. Some of them are required to speak more than one language and they deal with the supply of services throughout the world. Will the member apologise to those people?

Christine Grahame: I defend the workers in call centres because they are given low pay and no protection. As an ex-trade unionist, Duncan McNeil should be aware of the call centre in the Borders that will not allow trade unions in to enable the workers to have proper working conditions. That is my point. I remain a socialist. Duncan McNeil is not one.

Scotland is energy rich. It is the fourth largest producer of gas in the world, yet we have the highest cold-related death figures in western Europe. Age Concern estimates that, in the past five years, 14,000 Scots died as a direct result of cold-related illness in the winter months. That is 23 Scots every winter day, but Mr McNeil turns his back on that because it is not important. With

every 5 per cent increase in fuel costs, 30,000 Scots are plummeted back into fuel poverty. If members count up the recent price rises—including the rises that Powergen announced today—they will find that more than 120,000 Scots have been put back into fuel poverty. That is the truth in the real world of real people, rather than the stuff of pretty pictures in glossy brochures.

Members should consider Norway and the lies that we were told about Scotland and independence. We were told that the oil would run out and that we would be poor. The trouble is that we would not be poor. We would have been rich enough to spread the money around our people. In Norway—

Irene Oldfather: Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: I do not have time.

Between 1997 and 2004, Norway built up a fund of money to invest in infrastructure, to give to its people and to build up resources. If we had such an oil fund, we would have £30.77 billion to build roads, bridges, railways and schools. We would not have the nonsense of public-private partnerships and the private finance initiative, which are costly and precarious. That money would build regeneration. The Executive proposes cosmetic things such as dealing with three parts of the country that are, incidentally, Labour strongholds. We wonder why. There is an election next year. Perhaps the Executive is tossing out its first election bribe, but the people know better.

I move amendment S2M-4024.1, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"notes that after some seven years of this Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition and the launch of yet another glossy brochure littered with self-evident axioms, one in four Scottish children and one in five pensioners remain in poverty; further notes that tens of thousands of young people remain not in education, training or employment and that 39,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the first three years of this government and that, according to a report in *The Herald* on 28 February 2006, a spokesman for the First Minister stated regarding regeneration, "England has jumped ahead of us on this. This is us getting our act together"; therefore welcomes the Finance Committee's inquiry on deprivation spending, to report at the end of March, and recognises that, had the Scottish people not been deliberately misled about the impact of the energy reserves in the 1970s and the economic and social prospects of independence, poverty in Scotland would have been made history."

15:38

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): There are many issues to be discussed in a debate on regeneration, but it is impossible to cover them all in the short time that is available today. However, I say to the minister that it is not just words in glossy brochures that are important.

We must also consider the action that follows and, indeed, the action that the Executive has taken in the past seven years.

In speaking to the amendment in the name of my colleague Murdo Fraser, I start by welcoming the inclusion of the private sector. I say to the minister, "Welcome to the real world and to the policies that the Tories have been pursuing for many years." I am delighted that, throughout "People and Place: Regeneration Policy Statement", there is a commitment to engage and work with the private sector. That is welcome.

However, the recent figures from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which are mentioned in the Conservative amendment, make worrying reading. I do not want to give a speech full of statistics, but, for example, the number of working-age adults who do not have dependent children and who are in income poverty has increased by almost 100,000 in recent years. Economic and business statistics show that growth in Scotland remains well below that in the United Kingdom and that the number of business start-ups in Scotland is well below that for the rest of the UK. Such figures do not reflect a business-friendly environment.

The minister's foreword to the policy statement refers to growing urban communities, cities and coalfield areas. I assume that the Highlands and Islands are included in considerations, but I am concerned, because I should not need to assume that. Writing the 67-page statement took a lot of time and it should make a commitment to rural areas, where deprivation and the serious lack of access to public services are often masked by the fact that people live in idyllic surroundings rather than derelict urban landscapes.

I listened carefully to what the minister said. I may be wrong, but I did not pick up mention of a single penny of investment north of Dundee. That is also of concern. I do not want to be as sceptical as my colleague Christine Grahame was, but it is difficult not to be. The cost of flood prevention measures in Moray totals £132 million and I hope that the minister will give a commitment to that in his summing-up. Moray also has the lowest average wage rate of any constituency in Scotland. Yes—Glasgow and Ayrshire have problems, but we should not forget the remote and rural areas.

The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Allan Wilson): I share the member's concern for the low paid. Given her concern, why did she oppose the minimum wage?

Mary Scanlon: The minimum wage has not done much to bring wages in Moray up to the average for the whole of Scotland.

Among Government bodies, there is a great need for joined-up working and, more important,

joined-up thinking. I will give just one example. A person may undergo drug and alcohol rehabilitation after many years of chaos and problems. That process can take up to two years. However, at the end, that person is offered isolation and a place in a bed and breakfast, without organised support. If the document is about people, opportunities and chances to get people back into work, which we all support, far greater joined-up thinking is needed.

The theme of the debate is regeneration. As a resident of the Tesco capital of Scotland, I ask whether it must always be Tesco superstores that enter communities and offer extra jobs. Planning departments seem to take no cognisance of the jobs that are lost in old towns, for example. In Inverness, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Inverness and Nairn Enterprise, the Forestry Commission and the primary care trust all moved out to a new out-of-town development while the old town was left to wither on the vine. We support economic development and out-of-town development, but not at the cost of our old towns. When I asked people last week whether any town or city in Scotland has achieved the right balance between old town regeneration and new town development, the example that was given was Edinburgh. I would like to think that more than one city had not allowed its old town to die. We should keep an eye on that.

The Westminster Government has just finished a consultation on Gordon Brown's latest stealth tax—the planning gain supplement. That measure will have a significant impact on local authorities' ability to negotiate section 75 agreements. In fact, they will have no power. The tax will go to Westminster and the money is not guaranteed to return to the local authorities that raised it. The supplement will not only weaken local authorities' negotiating power, but mean that any infrastructure improvements that are associated with development will depend on the crumbs that are sent back north through Gordon Brown's latest tax.

In the middle of our considering a major planning bill—the first since 1947—why is the Westminster Parliament introducing the planning gain supplement, which will ride roughshod over an element of the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill? I hope that the minister will examine that in his summing-up, because it relates to a major part of regeneration.

I move amendment S2M-4024.2, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"notes the publication of the Scottish Executive's statement "People and Place: Regeneration Policy in Scotland"; further notes that under the Executive's stewardship the gap between the poorest and rich in our society is widening, as shown in recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation figures, and that the number of working-age

adults without dependent children who are in income poverty has increased from around 300,000 in the mid-1990s to almost 400,000 in recent years; believes that the key to tackling poverty is to have a thriving economy where people can find secure employment, and accordingly calls on the Executive to create an environment for businesses to invest in Scotland by reducing the burden of regulation and tax and by investing in our infrastructure."

15:45

Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): Obviously, it is very good that the Scottish Executive has addressed regeneration in its "People and Place: Regeneration Policy Statement". It is particularly welcome and clearly important that there is a continuing commitment to work more closely with the private sector to remove barriers to action and to bring about a more strategic and focused approach.

The minister mentioned the key features of the new strategy, which include two new urban regeneration companies to boost activity in Irvine bay and Inverclyde, more joint financial ventures to deliver regeneration more effectively, and a single contact point in the Scottish Executive that will act as a one-stop shop for business investors. The Liberal Democrats wish those initiatives well and attach considerable importance to the large investments that will be made. It is clearly right to address the problems of communities that have suffered ill effects as a result of changes in the economy and society in recent years. Having large areas of dereliction in Scotland is in no one's interest, but it is in everyone's interest to transform such dereliction and establish vibrant new communities and commercial activities.

Balanced development is important—I will give one example of that in the brief time that is available to me. Local authorities that see depopulation in one part of their area and population moves to another part of their area will be faced with serious problems. That has happened in the Inverclyde Council area, for example—the population has declined in the eastern part of the area and increased in the west. Such population increases and declines lead to immense difficulties for local authorities with respect to planning and providing education, transport, recreation and social work services. The Executive's policy is aimed at addressing those difficulties among others. In the second section of "People and Place", regeneration is set in the context of major transport, water infrastructure, schools and higher and further education investments.

Liberal Democrats want to see planning controls and regeneration funding being used to build balanced urban communities. Where that is possible, it will encourage decentralised decisions on regeneration initiatives. We want a regulatory

framework that encourages and supports community regeneration initiatives through financial incentives and support, and we believe that local authorities and the voluntary and independent sectors should co-operate to pursue regeneration. We also support community development trusts participating in drawing up regeneration plans.

There is a strong role for the Executive in helping local authorities to clear concentrations of derelict and vacant land. The money that is allocated by the Minister for Communities to councils—which we welcome—will help in that regard. My constituency, for example, recently benefited when a grant was made available to clear contaminated land on a gas works site in Hawick. That grant will allow redevelopment to take place. There is an important and continuing role for central Government, and the derelict land fund is an appropriate vehicle for delivery.

Many people in Scotland—perhaps the majority, depending on the calculation that is used—do not live in urban or rural areas: they live in towns and large villages throughout the country. In that context, there are opportunities beyond the policy statement to address regeneration issues if a focus is brought to bear on towns and larger villages. Many towns in Scotland face the same difficulties. Are they to be dormitories or are they to contain diverse communities? What investment is needed to sustain them? Where should the balance lie in that investment between public and private provision? What can be done to enhance the built environment? How can towns be linked to one another and to cities? Strategic development plans are important in that regard and I hope that they will focus on issues relating to towns and larger villages when the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill becomes law and those plans are produced.

Regeneration of towns throughout Scotland is important. I want to mention two issues in that regard, the first of which is the built environment. A recent survey by my local authority, Scottish Borders Council, demonstrated that unseen repairs and renewal work in towns can often amount to £200 million to £300 million across the authority area. How can the private sector be encouraged to make such renovations and improve our towns? Doing so is important in many towns in Scotland not only to enhance residents' quality of life, but to ensure that we continue to attract the tourism industry and visitors. Is there a case for enhancing improvement grants for the private sector in order to encourage work on the built environment?

The commercial registration of our towns is essential so that they can retain their young people. Too often, economically active young people leave our towns because they cannot

obtain suitable employment or housing. A great deal of investment is going into housing to provide sustainable communities but, as far as regeneration is concerned, it is immensely important to ensure that a career structure is available for young people locally. It is often said that it is the job that counts, but beyond that, it is the job prospects that count: the question whether someone can develop a career locally will influence their decision on whether to stay or leave.

There is little doubt that there is a continuing role for local enterprise companies to play in regeneration throughout Scotland. The enterprise system must have a local dimension so that it is flexible and responsive to local needs. For example, input into the redevelopment of high streets and the diversification of businesses there cannot be driven centrally. That needs local input. Perhaps ministers might like to reflect on the role of the enterprise networks' local input when they are developing policy.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the statement's emphasis on regeneration, as well as the Executive's other recent announcements, and we look to build on the progress that has been made thus far in towns and villages in particular.

15:51

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):

The "People and Place" policy document clearly establishes the important, yet often overlooked, principle that community regeneration must involve both personal and physical regeneration. Too often in the past, well-meaning Governments have failed to strike the right balance. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, community regeneration, as practised by the Community Development Foundation, focused heavily on personal and community development. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, first the new life for urban Scotland initiative, and then Ian Lang's important, yet ultimately flawed, document, "Programme for Partnership", moved the balance firmly towards the large-scale physical regeneration of our poorest communities.

I have commented on those initiatives in previous debates. They are to be commended for the realisation that no single sector, be it Government, the private sector or civic society, can deal with the complex problems that are associated with regenerating our poorest communities. However, they missed the central point, which is that the physical regeneration of our communities must be part of the process of personal and social development of those communities. They are not separate elements of the same task; rather, physical and social regeneration are different sides of the same coin.

I will use the little time that I have to speak about the regeneration that has taken place in Petersburn, in my constituency. The work that has been done by all the partners in Petersburn has helped to transform what was once one of the worst housing estates in central Scotland into one of the best. Central to the process of that physical regeneration has been the development of community capacity in the area—what Robert Putnam would call "social capital".

Petersburn has been, and continues to be, an excellent example of genuine partnership working. The Scottish Executive, Link Housing Association and North Lanarkshire Council have worked in partnership with local people to rebuild the housing, the community and the surrounding village. I say to Christine Grahame that the people who live in Petersburn certainly do not think that that rebuilding was any sort of electoral bribe.

The Petersburn Development Trust, of which I am a director—so I must declare an interest—recently won the runner-up prize at the prestigious Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum awards. In presenting the award, SURF commented:

"The Petersburn Development Trust in Airdrie is an excellent model of participation and joint working between a range of public, private and voluntary organisations ... The activities of the PDT have resulted in better community cohesion and involvement, and young people are being empowered through a new sense of local pride. The judges were impressed by the initiative taken by the community and their sustained willingness to work in partnership with others to achieve the aims of the Trust."

One way in which the local community is being supported is through the provision of personal computers and broadband connections. PC links is a partnership project. Capital funding has been provided for it by Communities Scotland and the Link Housing Association, and computer training is being provided by North Lanarkshire Council. As well as enhancing people's skills, and therefore improving their employment opportunities, the project brings practical benefits, in that all the work for the Petersburn Development Trust can be done using computers and e-mail. In addition, some of the more complex funding applications are completed by e-mailing the forms between trust members for their comments.

Before concluding, I will highlight one or two other important points that are mentioned in the regeneration policy statement. It rightly points out the importance of developing infrastructure for the economic and social regeneration of our poorest communities. That is why I welcome the Executive's commitment to reopen the Airdrie to Bathgate railway line. Furthermore, the statement is correct to highlight the importance of the planning process to regeneration. It is vital that we take the opportunity of the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill to create a planning system that is fair to

communities and conducive to economic development.

I commend "People and Place" and look forward to it providing a robust framework for the regeneration of many of Scotland's communities.

15:56

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): Any debate or policy that attempts to address regeneration and deprivation is to be welcomed. However, as always, the devil is in the detail and I will expand on that as I go on.

My colleague, Christine Grahame, was right about the level of poverty in the population, particularly among children and pensioners. We should be reminded that if it was not for the legacy of past unionist Governments, our country would not be in such poverty. I do not know whether we are allowed to use the word "lies" in Parliament, but untruths were certainly told about the amount of oil and wealth that Scotland could have had in the early 1970s. Perhaps if we had been told the truth, we would not be having this debate today. We must recognise that. The Westminster Government should apologise to the Scottish people for what it has done. No other country would put up with it and we should all hang our heads in shame that a unionist Government was allowed to get away with it. Therefore, I congratulate Christine Grahame on her speech.

I sometimes think that Glasgow—the area that I represent—should be renamed the phoenix. Glasgow has reinvented itself time and time again, and some areas have reinvented themselves very well. The minister mentioned housing. Of course, housing is being built along the banks of the Clyde, but only for people who can afford to pay £250,000 or more for it. At the same time, and straight across the road, the typical high flats—which are not unlike the £250,000 flats—are being bulldozed by the Glasgow Housing Association and people are being moved out of their communities.

If we are talking about regeneration, let us think about communities as well—as Karen Whitefield rightly said. Communities deserve to be regenerated, but perhaps that should happen in areas that are actually communities; we must remember that. The GHA was set up by the Executive and it is an absolute disgrace. Local housing organisations are banging at the doors of the Executive and Communities Scotland asking them to look at the GHA because they cannot go on to secondary transfer. The Executive made a promise, but they are not able to move on to secondary transfer because there is a funding shortfall of £300 million.

Let us also not forget that, although the GHA is a social landlord, it has the highest rents of any

landlord in Glasgow. That is an absolute disgrace. The minister talks about regenerating communities, but I would like to see him regenerate them by giving them proper control over their housing and not leaving the GHA to tell them what to do.

On transport, Glasgow needs to have closure on the crossrail scheme, which would open up the whole of Glasgow and Ayr. Someone coming from Edinburgh would not need to change trains. The idea has been on the cards for 25 to 30 years. I ask the minister for an answer on that as well as on a transport strategy for Glasgow.

Will the minister explain exactly what urban regeneration companies will do? Before he tells me that I have not read the document—I have—I will go through some of the organisations that already exist for regeneration. We have LECs. As we all know, Scottish Enterprise gets a block of money, takes out a large chunk for its own administration and hands the rest to the LECs, which take out large chunks to meet their administration costs. We used to have 48 social inclusion partnerships, and I could go on about some of them all day. They all had administration costs. We also had community planning partnerships, which are now community regeneration funds.

I ask the minister, sincerely, whether the regeneration companies will be headed by someone. Will they be in a building? Will all the companies that I mentioned sign up to a memorandum of understanding, as mentioned on page 23 of the policy statement? Are we creating new bodies or simply duplicating existing ones? How many people will be employed and what exactly will they do? From reading the policy statement, I cannot see what they will do that is not already being done.

16:00

Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): Since the Parliament came into being and the Executive came into power, by any objective measure, massive progress has been made in the area of regeneration investment. It does not suit politicians of different political hues to acknowledge that point. However, as Karen Whitefield and others have outlined, progress has been made on investing in and developing a consensus policy for a sensible way forward.

However, I have no hesitation in saying that there are areas that require serious attention to ensure that the regeneration programme moves forward, further and faster than it has done in many parts of the country. To that extent, I welcome the Executive's willingness to take stock—it is eminently sensible to show willingness

to take stock. My concern is only that I would like to see the document going further on specific points about how some barriers might be removed and some actions might be taken. I want the minister to explain how and when we might see some meat on the project's bones.

The approach taken in the statement is to set out geographic priorities. I understand why that sensible approach has been taken and why the areas that are referred to as geographic priorities have been selected for that purpose. I also listened carefully to what the minister said about how the principles and the action referred to in the statement will apply in other parts of the country. Nonetheless, I urge ministers to be cautious about the language used and the approach of identifying "geographic priorities", to ensure that they do not even unintentionally serve to ignore the fact that there are major issues to be addressed in other parts of the country.

I appeal directly to the minister, Malcolm Chisholm, as a constituency neighbour in Edinburgh. In both our constituencies, the largest regeneration projects in the east of the country have been undertaken—at Leith waterfront and at Craigmillar. The projects are important, not just for the city but for Scotland more widely. Their economic strategic importance to Edinburgh is immense, as they address housing supply, the labour market and so on. I know that the minister agrees on those points—I certainly hope that he does. It is important to convey the message and to translate it into a plan for how action and investment can be distributed across the country.

I am glad that the document majors on the importance of leadership and clarity of purpose, but if they are to be achieved, practical matters need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The points made about the multiplicity of organisations and the LECs are real. I am not advocating lots of top-down structural reform. God help us—that would only delay matters further still. Instead, some practical and pragmatic measures need to be put in place by the Executive and local authorities to get rid of the spaghetti that stands in the way of making progress in many communities. Will the minister consider how to force such measures through and build leadership in the public sector in Scotland? I refer him to the work carried out by Audit Scotland, examined in turn by the Audit Committee, that shows how little has been done by the Executive to build leadership capacity in the public sector. We need people with leadership skills who can do that work nationally and locally.

I am glad that we are willing to learn lessons from other parts of the UK, which is something we should be more willing to do. I urge the minister also to learn lessons from closer to home. The

statement says that the Executive will take a more proactive leadership role. I am fine with that but I hope that that will be about the Executive. I have listened to those with experience of regeneration projects on the ground. They have informed me of the barriers that they face and about what needs to be done at an Executive level to fix them. Every member will welcome it if we can get that relationship and momentum going.

16:04

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): We have just heard a balanced speech from the Labour back benches. I will try to offer a similar amount of balance from my perspective.

I begin by acknowledging that the problems that we are discussing are hard to address. No Government, whatever its political persuasion, would find it easy to address them by rebalancing the powers of our four different levels of government—or even by getting rid of one of those levels. I also acknowledge that the damage that can be done to economies and local communities in a fairly short space of time—even a few months or years—can take generations to begin to heal. For those reasons, the SNP's amendment goes a little too far for my taste in attributing blame for past events rather than talking about the future, on which we should focus.

I argue that the future of regeneration, like the future of our society and economy more generally, must be grounded in sustainable development. I am disappointed that the report did not emphasise that more. As Karen Whitefield said, there needs to be a balance between different aspects of regeneration—physical, social, economic and environmental. Those aspects underpin sustainable development and must underpin our approach to regeneration. There are forms of development that harm communities. In some cases, that harm can be mitigated, so that it can be tolerated, but there are other forms of development for which we cannot find mitigation and that we simply should not pursue.

On the role of the private sector, I agree with the Executive's statement that the private sector has a vital role to play in regeneration. Almost everyone accepts that. However, I am pleased that the Executive is not relying absolutely on the PPP finance mechanism, because the case against it remains strong. I ask the minister in closing to say more about the criteria that he believes should apply. Where should PPP be thought of as appropriate and where should it not? In the private sector, there is a huge difference between the contribution that locally owned businesses can make to the regeneration of communities and local economies and the consequences of overreliance on attracting external investment from big

businesses, which by its nature is often temporary. The Executive is strongly reliant on gross domestic product as an economic indicator. I remind the minister that half of Scottish GDP is based on locally owned businesses, often family businesses.

In the short time that I have left, I will comment briefly on land issues. The Executive refers to the need to

"Tackle land and property issues which can inhibit regeneration".

As my colleagues and I have done on many previous occasions, I urge the Executive to remain open minded about the concept of land value taxation, which we support as an alternative to current local government finance and business rates. Even if it is just an additional, occasional tool in the box, it has huge potential to invigorate development of the kind that we support, in the locations that we support, and to contribute to the common good.

In closing, I emphasise the need for the balance about which Karen Whitefield and others have spoken. If we do not want money that we have put in to continue to leak out of communities, we must ensure that there is local ownership and vibrancy, not just physical regeneration.

16:09

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): It is encouraging that two Cabinet ministers are present for the debate. That leads one to hope that there may be genuine co-operation and some of the famous joined-up government that we hear about. Hitherto, community regeneration has fallen down a hole between enterprise and development assistance. A wider range of ministers need to be involved.

I share the enthusiasm for land value taxation or site value rating. The report states that the Executive will

"Examine mechanisms for realising increases in land values arising from public sector investment in development".

That must surely open the door to consideration of site value rating, which would help to put pressure on people who own neglected sites, because they would pay tax as if the site had been developed. It would also help existing businesses in poorer areas because their land would not be as valuable as land in more prosperous areas, so they would pay less tax. We should examine seriously the important issue of land value taxation.

My main point is that, over the years, well-meaning Governments of different varieties have put money into what are perceived as being poorer or less developed areas, but that approach

has not worked. Improvements have been made in some places, but inspection of a map that shows areas with the most unemployment 20 years ago and a map that shows such areas now reveals that the areas with the worst education, the most petty crime and so on have stayed the same. Top-down funding does not work; bottom-up funding is required. We must help communities to create their own initiatives. There is quite a lot in the report about helping communities, but the idea is still that somebody will tell them what to do. We must harness communities' own energy. People in such communities have a far better idea of what needs doing than we do.

We must encourage local initiatives. The Executive and Parliament have made a start by introducing a better voting system for local government. When the voters get a grip of the system, it will enable them to choose better people, so there should be a better quality of person in councils. However, an opportunity is being lost. A document that was published about community councils states that nothing will be done about giving them more power. Community councils can be a great vehicle for delivering local initiative, which is what we want. There should be systems for giving small grants to local projects, with a minimum of bureaucracy. We would help such projects, but we would expect some of them to go wrong and others to succeed. Such an approach would enable real local development that would last. That would be preferable to a scheme being parachuted in.

People such as Mr Sirolli, who I know Nicol Stephen's predecessor met, have interesting ideas about development. There are techniques to help local people to have an idea and enable it to flourish and grow. In that way, local people can develop their own quality of life and, as was said, get stuck into local planning. There is a lot of scope for developing real local democracy. We have never managed to achieve that before, but there is a real opportunity to get it right now.

16:13

Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): For many years, I and my colleagues in Kilmarnock and East Ayrshire have campaigned for extra effort from Government to aid the regeneration of our community. We have done so because of a desire to improve our community environment, to improve our economic opportunities, to give improved opportunities to all in our community and to put us back on the map after being ignored for years.

It is accepted that to regenerate an area a strategy that is owned by the community must be in place. After many months—some would say years—we now have the final piece of the strategy

that will address the varied needs that must be met to regenerate East Ayrshire and, in particular, Kilmarnock.

It is worth noting that many funding allocations, for example the supporting people fund, better neighbourhood funding, schools PPP funding and the town centre living initiative, all fall into the category of regeneration, although many see them as specific initiatives. Some people in Kilmarnock deliberately forget what has been achieved on regeneration across the council area. They narrow their thoughts and comments to the town centre, and their answer to regeneration is to have an expensive guru who will regenerate our town centre. Unfortunately, they are also given significant space by the local newspaper, the *Kilmarnock Standard*, which I am sure will ignore the positive announcement by the minister yesterday and will continue the doom-and-gloom, narrow, parochial view and miss the big picture of what is being achieved and what can be achieved by working in partnership.

Many private companies out there are willing and able to work with local authorities. It takes time and effort to get the strategy, but once they have it, they are willing partners. The minister saw yesterday what can be achieved by working in partnership, with the public sector bearing the cost of infrastructure and the private sector funding the development of a site. The site to which I refer is in north Muirfield, on the outskirts of Kilmarnock. The public sector will recoup its pump-priming moneys when the site is occupied and the local economy will benefit from the new jobs that will be created. That process will continue in an area of the town centre of Kilmarnock that has been identified for an office development, which has attracted significant private sector interest.

It is imperative that regeneration does not smother the unique aspects of communities and town centres but builds on them. We do not want or need cloned towns and communities across Scotland. Just because some developers have a particular model does not mean that we must all have the same model. All areas are different and we should let them continue to be different and bold; we should not hold them back.

Planning obstacles must not be put in the way of the vision to deliver much-needed housing development. In Kilmarnock, we have a development that was blighted for 25 years. The owner allowed it to fall into disrepair, be set on fire and then demolished. Someone else—a local developer—came along, but it has taken them three years to get planning permission. That type of delay in the planning process gives the opportunity for continued criticism by those who have no vision. It is not possible for one person, organisation, community, local business, council,

public body or private company to deliver a regeneration programme. Only when we have an agreed community-based plan for regeneration are we able to demonstrate to our communities that we are serious about regenerating them by working in partnership with them to deliver.

16:17

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I stand here so often with a sense of déjà vu and I have—encore—that sense now. In the previous session of Parliament there was the cities review, the annual social justice report—which has been abandoned—the sustainable development strategy, the closing the opportunity gap strategy, the smart, successful Scotland strategy and the employability framework. Now we have a regeneration strategy, which is a “statement of intent” and a commitment to

“a series of meetings and events ... to discuss our approach to regeneration”.

However, it is not, as it has been billed, a policy statement; rather it is, as the minister said, the start of a process. No new policies have been laid out, nor have any new plans or real actions that can be pinned down. The statement is all a bit amorphous and insubstantial. It says things such as,

“We aim to lay down a framework for our future action”.

An action plan, in fact, is due later this year. That is all, despite a ministerial group having met for the past two years.

We do, however, have new terminology. We now have “mixed ... communities”, which have taken over from balanced communities. I am still waiting for a minister to tell me what the heck a balanced community is. The Executive never defined it, so it has changed it. This time we are not having a steering group, a consultative panel, a task force or a working group—we are having a “sounding board”.

I have a real concern about the “People and Place” document, but that is overshadowed by a greater initiative sickness because there has been initiative upon initiative. The Executive may attempt to convince us that that is joined-up government, but it comes across instead as a confusing and crowded bidding agenda. There is lack of clarity and a waste of resources at Executive and agency levels. Will the two urban regeneration companies have any relationship at all with the pathfinder companies that were announced last year? Is the funding for regeneration additional to the cities growth fund and the vacant and derelict land fund? We hear more and more announcements all the time, but how many measures are delivered? How many are completed? What will have to give this time, to allow another measure to go ahead?

If the proposed policy is actually one of consolidation, the minister should tell us exactly how much new money is being committed by the Government, and how much money is forecast or expected from the private sector. Is the Commonwealth games village in Glasgow included in the policy? Will the minister tell us now or will we, further down the line, have to watch the charade of Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Executive standing up, patting each other on the back and reannouncing money?

I could talk for ever about housing, but I am running out of time. How often will the 21,500 affordable homes be reannounced? Why are we still encouraging private sector developers and registered social landlords to build for sale or rent in the most deprived areas? As for the idea of demonstration mixed-tenure projects, they have been around for years and years. We do not need any more pilot schemes.

We have areas of deprivation and we have to address the consequences of market failure in the west of Scotland. That has to be done, but it is to the shame of successive Governments that areas that had heavy industries in the past are still undergoing transition. If the market is structurally tilted against people, and if we cannot make macro-adjustments to the way in which they compete in that market, we are forced to intervene at a micro level. We are forced to put sticking plasters over gaping wounds. It is sad for our nation that that is what this Executive seems to be intent on doing.

16:22

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): I could not agree more with Christine Grahame: the document is another waste of paper. It is about policy wonks congratulating themselves. It is propaganda and it is a marketing ploy. In all its 68 pages, there is no intention to begin to bring about grass-roots regeneration.

I never thought that I would use words that Prince Charles had used, and it galls me to do so, but this document is a product of people sitting behind desks and taking decisions on things they know nothing about. It is a manifesto for a loss of power for communities. The new model of strategic partnership is designed to prevent communities from having a say; it is designed to work against participation by communities that are supposed to be the beneficiaries of regeneration. As Bob Holman, the writer and sociologist who lived in Easterhouse, has put it, the model is

"little different from the elitist urban development corporations so dear to Mrs Thatcher."

That one phrase sums up the 68 pages of the document. It is paternalism. Its attitude is, "We'll

ask the children their view, and then we'll exercise the maxim, 'Daddy knows best.'"

People who live in the communities know exactly that that is the tone that they are hearing. They know the attitudes of the people who are driving the regeneration—the attitudes to them, their housing, their community resources, their community services and their existing networks. The document is another example from Fantasyland that bears no relation to what is actually happening in communities.

The minister mentioned the Clyde corridor. Given the amount of money that has gone into the Clyde corridor, how much involvement has there been by the local community? Absolutely none. How can a person get access to decision making on the Clyde corridor? I have no idea. My living-room window looks out on to the brand-new flats. I eventually managed to get through to someone to get information, after going round in circles. Do members know how many units of social housing there will be in the Clyde corridor among the 4,000 big flashy flats? There will be 40, and that figure is not even statutory or definite. It might not happen. The document talks about driving regeneration and tackling the concentrated deprivation in the area. What a joke—the only people who will benefit are the big development companies.

On previous occasions, I have mentioned the fact that no private money is being put into the Lennoxtown Initiative. The model involves a private limited company with a chairman. No one in the community knows who can get on the board—people have tried to get on the board and have asked for an election. The reporting-back mechanism is an annual general meeting at which members of the community are not allowed to move any proposals. The set-up stinks and is giving off whiffs of corruption.

In Paisley, there is the Shortroods regeneration. For four months, I have been trying to find out about the venture company that has been set up to do that regeneration. It has six board members, who include representatives of the local council, the Royal Bank of Scotland and Scottish Enterprise. It is more difficult to find out how its decisions are made and what will happen than it is to trace the financial transactions of Tessa Jowell and David Mills. That is the reality on the ground for many people who are involved in regeneration projects.

The companies that have been set up are trying to prevent communities from being involved in decision making, but it does not have to be like that. The Executive has chosen the model—we know exactly where it is going—but serious models of participatory democracy already exist internationally; for example, in Brazil there are models of community involvement. Such models

have been used by the United Nations and the World Bank because they are transparent and they combat corruption. A whiff of corruption surrounds companies such as the Lennoxtown Initiative, on which it is not possible to get information. I urge the Executive to adopt a different model. I say to the minister that "People and Place" is mince.

16:26

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): The title of today's motion, "Regeneration in Scotland—People and Place", is important because it expresses clearly the approach that we must take to regeneration. That approach is not just about housing, important though that is; it is also about our communities as a whole. I have seen it working in my constituency. It ensures that major stakeholders work together to provide improved economic opportunities and infrastructure, a better environment, safer communities and—most important—genuine community engagement and participation. All that is helping to build a sense of pride in the community in which I live.

I have been able to play an active part in that process and to observe at first hand the impact that it has had on my constituency. As a member of the Dysart regeneration forum, I realise the important role that the community has to play in assessing and addressing its needs and I recognise the benefits that involvement in regeneration has brought to individuals. Confidence building, the development of new skills and people playing an active role in shaping the area in which they live are all key factors.

When we develop policy, we need to ensure that we are all aware of what we want and need to achieve and how we can measure that achievement. However, we should not get too tied up in measurement because some improvements are qualitative and it sometimes takes a long time for measurable improvements to become apparent.

Fife has formed a sustainable communities group and has agreed to focus regeneration activity on specific geographical areas. It is quite correct that the areas that have been chosen are the 20 per cent most-deprived areas as identified by the Scottish index of multiple deprivation. As part of the development of an action plan, existing master plans are being updated so that they align with the agreed priorities. In addition, over the next few months the regeneration manager will produce a draft Kirkcaldy regeneration action plan in which Dysart, the regeneration area in my constituency, will feature and through which best practice arising from the evidence that we have gained in Dysart can be rolled out.

The Dysart regeneration forum and the Dysart management committee have worked together in genuine partnership to the benefit of their community. The regeneration programme is now reaping the rewards of the hard work and commitment of the community and stakeholders. There is investment in housing and emphasis has been placed on safer communities through the introduction of community wardens.

Project development in the area has fallen into a number of categories. Encouragement of community spirit has resulted in the reintroduction of the Dysart gala day, which had not taken place for many years. Health and well-being have been improved through the food and health initiative. A regeneration worker has been employed to examine employability and environmental improvements across the board have been considered. We have developed tourism potential, improved services and opportunities for school children and young people and have improved services for the elderly. Those are the results of communities working together. I thank everyone who has been involved in the project.

I welcome the new regeneration policy that the Executive unveiled on Tuesday and I am pleased that the Executive intends to play a wider, more strategic and ambitious leadership role in regeneration. I firmly believe that economic growth and tackling poverty are inextricably linked, which is why I believe that the Minister for Transport and Telecommunications must reconsider tolling on the Forth and Tay bridges. Penalising a community as Fife is being penalised will have an impact on its social and economic regeneration—Fife must not and cannot be subjected to such a discriminatory policy.

Regeneration gives the opportunity to improve the places where we live and the lives of people who are in most need by providing access to high-quality services for the most disadvantaged people. Regeneration is about people and place. I support the motion in the name of the minister.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): We move to the wind-up speeches. I call Duncan McNeil.

16:30

Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): In the interests of balance, I will bring some facts to the debate to counter the terrible and depressing stuff that we have heard from the SNP.

Through the actions of the Scottish Executive, 630,000 Scots have been taken out of absolute poverty, 190,000 of whom are pensioners. In addition, we have created 34,000 modern apprenticeships and we have achieved that figure two years ahead of target. We have lifted the

burden from council house tenants in Glasgow by shifting it to the UK taxpayer, thereby enabling 1,000 new houses to be produced each year for those people, 99 per cent of whom are now in tenant-controlled housing stock, with 600 tenants participating in the management of their housing. We have achieved that and more.

Scotland's employment rate is now the best in the UK and is also among the highest in Europe—unemployment is down by a third. In trying to meet our aim of ending child poverty, the number of children who live in absolute poverty has been halved. We have provided better transport links, including road, rail and station improvements and more bus and rail journeys are being made.

Despite those efforts, some communities—such as mine—continue to miss out on the chance to gain from the improvements. It is very difficult to invest in and to grow communities that are in decline because we are competing with Edinburgh and the heart of Glasgow. The minister said that it is important to do more, better and that areas such as Inverclyde and North Ayrshire must not be left behind in the regeneration strategy. That signals the Executive's determination to ensure that that will not happen.

Alex Neil: Is not it the case that the areas that have found it most difficult to attract investment are those that have had unbroken Labour rule for about 50 years?

Mr McNeil: Those areas are the traditional Labour heartlands where people followed traditional employment patterns for many years. However, when those working people have taken up new employment, Alex Neil's colleague Christine Grahame has denigrated them for doing so. People have sought to move on from the traditional industries; they are working hard to create lives for themselves and to provide good homes and so on for their families, yet the SNP denigrates them for doing so. Alex Neil cannot give me any lectures.

Tory members may be smiling, but Patrick Harvie got it right when he said that when tens of thousands of jobs are taken out of a community, the result is problems such as those that we have in my area. That is what happens, irrespective of the political leadership in the area. The job is a difficult one, but it is one that we are determined to tackle.

The Clyde corridor is to become a national priority and a massive investment—£1.5 billion—will go into it as a result. The Tories refuse to welcome any of the investment. In their amendment, they seek to remove the word “welcomes”. As the minister pointed out, regional priorities have been set for areas such as Inverclyde and North Ayrshire, which will continue

to face the challenges to which I alluded earlier. I call those problems the three Ds: deindustrialisation, depopulation and deprivation. Both those areas have great potential and I invite members, including Christine Grahame, to come and see the potential for themselves. Anyone who comes to Inverclyde will see it. The river that used to be the success of the past can become our future. That is why even someone who is as hard to please as I am welcomes the initiative.

The announcement that Inverclyde and Irvine bay are to get their own urban regeneration companies is important. I say to Donald Gorrie that, instead of top-down objectives being imposed, those companies will work to promote confidence and to support communities in delivering their objectives. I hope that those companies will generate the confidence that will encourage investment and move us forward. I think that they will deliver on the ground by sealing the deals and bringing benefits.

A question that was never far below the surface in some speeches is the one that is posed in dysfunctional families: “Where's the money?” It has been acknowledged that we can draw on massive amounts of private investment. To be fair, the Executive has shown its determination to provide statutory funding—it is in there for the long term. I am sure that the Executive is determined to succeed. If I may focus on my community, Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire has committed £10 million to the Inverclyde regeneration programme.

However, the First Minister made it clear in yesterday's announcement on regeneration that the issue is about not just money, but about changing how we work so that we ensure that a joined-up approach across Executive departments and agencies supports local action. Karen Whitefield, Donald Gorrie and Susan Deacon mentioned that. “Partnership working” and “joined-up government” are overused phrases, but they are not meaningless just because they can be used inappropriately. Genuine partnership working is not about throwing together a group of agencies and departments that have their own agendas and interests and which will negotiate themselves into a stalemate; it is about operating in concert, which requires real leadership, as the regeneration policy statement acknowledges.

I am under pressure for time, so I will move on quickly. If communities such as mine are to share in Scotland's increased prosperity, concerted efforts are needed at all levels. The policy that we are discussing will tackle the hard problems that Patrick Harvie described. It will give communities a real chance in the future.

16:37

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

The debate has been interesting and wide ranging and we have heard well-informed speeches from members of different parties.

I received my copy of the regeneration policy statement yesterday evening and I agree with Christine Grahame—probably for the only time in the debate—that it is ridiculous of the Executive to provide us with a 67-page document and expect us to be able to digest its contents in time for a well-informed debate the following afternoon. I hope that the Executive will reflect on that, because if it is to produce new strategy documents that contain such detail, it should give us a little more notice, so that we can have a better-informed debate. Members have had a busy afternoon dealing with other important business, in particular the statement on tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges, so some members' minds have been elsewhere.

The Conservative amendment refers to the situation that we currently face. As Mary Scanlon said, poverty continues to blight the lives of far too many Scots, as research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation demonstrates. The number of working-age adults who have no dependent children and who are in income poverty has increased from around 300,000 in the mid-1990s to almost 400,000 in recent years. The gap between the richest and poorest in society is increasing. Life expectancy in the poorest postcode areas of Scotland is 64.4 years, which is lower than life expectancy in Lebanon, North Korea or the Gaza strip. Indeed, life expectancy in the poorest areas of Scotland has fallen since 1992, so much needs to be done.

Christine Grahame: Is the minister aware that in one Labour ward in Glasgow, life expectancy for a male is 54 years?

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to Christine Grahame for promoting me to a ministerial position. The statistic that she gives proves my point. Much needs to be done.

New strategies from the Executive are always welcome. If nothing else, they demonstrate that the old strategies have not always worked. The key to regenerating communities is economic regeneration. The areas that are targeted in the regeneration policy statement—the Clyde corridor, Inverclyde and Ayrshire—are blighted by a lack of economic progress. If we are to turn those communities round, the fundamental need is for more investment, more jobs and a stronger economy. The Executive's record in that context is simply not good enough. Scotland's annual growth rate is dragging behind that of our competitors south of the border. The minister will probably tell

me that Scotland managed to match the UK growth rate in the most recent quarter. However, we managed to do so only because the UK growth rate fell towards the level of the Scottish rate.

Very worrying for the minister, in an analysis that was published on Friday in that fine organ, *The Scotsman*, Professor David Bell made the point—backed up with evidence—that the level of economic growth in Scotland is artificially inflated by the high level of public sector expenditure. If we stripped out public sector expenditure which, as we know, is much higher in Scotland than it is in the rest of the UK, the pretty feeble economic growth figures for the past five or six years would be even worse and the gap between Scottish and UK growth would be even larger than it has been in the past few years. The Executive must tackle the lack of competitiveness in the Scottish economy. Rather than publish glossy brochures, the Executive should tackle the fundamentals, such as business rates and the cost of doing business—the Executive has taken a step in the right direction on that, but it needs to progress more quickly. The Executive should invest in infrastructure and tackle the problems with Scottish Water and business regulation. We support and welcome much of the detail in the strategy but, unless the general business environment improves, the strategy will achieve little.

I do not want to steal anybody's thunder for tomorrow's debate on Scottish Water, but development constraints are a huge issue for economic regeneration throughout Scotland—they are a huge problem in the area in which I live and throughout my region and for communities elsewhere. Unless we sort out those problems and allow economic expansion, we will not even be able to start on the bottom rung of the ladder in dealing with the problems that have been mentioned. We need a joined-up approach from Government. We also need to deal with planning issues, although we welcome the start that has been made through the Executive's Planning etc (Scotland) Bill towards easing the problems that delays in the planning process create for major infrastructure projects.

I accept that the problems in our communities are not only to do with physical infrastructure. Karen Whitefield made that point and was gracious enough to draw attention to initiatives of the former Conservative Government—like her, I always acknowledge the actions of political opponents with which we agree. The issue is not only about material poverty and material regeneration; we need to deal with all sorts of problems in our communities, such as family breakdown, alcohol and drug abuse, poor housing, crime and poor public services. Of course, the

poorest in society suffer the most when public services fail.

We must be careful that more direct Government intervention does not simply entrench a culture of welfare dependency, which can be counterproductive. Donald Gorrie made exactly that point when he said that not everything should come from the top down and that we need to empower communities to start building from the bottom up. We need imaginative solutions for real community regeneration to build stronger communities. In that respect, the proposals on supporting the voluntary sector and the social economy are extremely welcome.

Fundamentally, we will regenerate communities if we have a stronger economy. If the Executive is working towards that, it will have our support.

16:43

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I begin by going back to one of the original comprehensive regeneration programmes, the GEER—Glasgow east end regeneration—project, which was set up in the late 1970s by the then Secretary of State for Scotland, Bruce Millan, and which was reported on and evaluated in the 1980s. The evaluation report contained an important lesson that has not been fully learned: we can spend millions upon millions of pounds on the physical regeneration of areas such as the east end of Glasgow but, unless we create indigenous economic strength and high-calibre employment opportunities for the people who live there, the areas will have to be regenerated again in a few years. Without sustained employment and economic activity, they end up back at square one.

In regenerating areas throughout Scotland, whether towns such as Kilmarnock or larger areas such as the Clyde estuary, the priority must be the creation of sustainable employment. When Gordon Brown was the shadow chancellor, he rightly spoke about his aspiration for full and fulfilling employment. It is probably true that we have one of the highest-ever levels of employment in Scotland but, ironically, we also have the highest-ever level of economic inactivity. That sounds like a contradiction, but it is because of the large number of people who are on incapacity benefit, primarily, and other long-term benefits, and because of the number of people who have been forced into early retirement rather than added to the unemployment figures. Until we tackle economic inactivity, we will never solve the regeneration puzzle or achieve our objectives. The prerequisite to success must be the creation of not just any kind of job but high-value, well-paid, decent employment opportunities.

Why do we not have that level of employment opportunity? Why is it that many of the jobs that

have been created in the past few years are relatively low paid, often insecure and often with unsocial hours? Much of that goes back not just for the past seven or nine years but for the past 40 years. There has been a lack of sufficient investment in the public and private sectors in Scotland and probably throughout the UK. Even today, the level of private sector investment in Scotland as a share of our GDP is less than half that of our major competitors.

Irene Oldfather: Will the member give way?

Alex Neil: In a minute.

The share of public spending that is allocated to investment is less than half that which is allocated to investment by our competitors. Whether we are talking about the profile of public or private sector spending, the key phrase is the lack of sufficient investment—in infrastructure, in the scientific base, in skills and in business and industry. We will not solve the problem until we double the level of investment in the private sector and the share of public spending on investment. That is the greatest challenge for us at present. I will let Irene Oldfather in because naeboddy else has.

Irene Oldfather: I appreciate that. I wonder whether the member will be voting tonight for the £300,000 that will come to my communities as a result of the package that the minister announced, as it will enable the lifting of barriers to private sector investment and activity, which is just the sort of thing that he has been talking about.

Alex Neil: I was hoping for a higher level of intervention than that. I am sure that Irene Oldfather shares my concern that it does not help Ayrshire's cause in trying to attract private sector investment when the chairman of Scottish Enterprise compares its economy to that of an eastern European country. Irene Oldfather was not there; I was.

The other key issue is the need for a sustained strategy. In the 1980s, the Tories introduced the urban renewal programme, which had limited success in a number of areas of Scotland. However, that came to an end and has been succeeded by umpteen different programmes and umpteen different organisations. To use the example of the Irish—although I could use many other examples—we need a long-term national development programme that people stick to over a 20-year period and that is not riddled with bureaucracy and urban development companies that create jobs for the Labour boys. We need a long-term strategy, the centrepiece of which is investment in the community with, as Donald Gorrie said, priorities that are set at the community level. We can talk and talk about regeneration, but we will never get it unless we are prepared to face up to the realities of life.

16:50

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen): Christine Grahame started off the speeches that followed Malcolm Chisholm's. I am not quite sure how one would best respond to her speech, which was a seven-minute flow of stream-of-consciousness negativity without a constructive proposal or SNP policy.

Christine Grahame: I gave the example of the Norwegian economy and what it had done. That is where Scotland ought to be today, not where it is now.

Nicol Stephen: Well, I heard a lot of criticism and a lot of negativity. Perhaps there was a mention of Norway and other overseas examples, but I heard little explanation of how such policies would be implemented by the SNP.

I have always been concerned about the issue of winter deaths, having represented the area of Braemar and Ballater at one time. However, Christine Grahame could have pointed out that the Executive has insulated 220,000 homes, installed nearly 60,000 new central heating systems and invested more than £200 million in this area. I ask her to give a balanced view. We are taking action in these areas and are making progress.

Mary Scanlon was not as sceptical as Christine Grahame. She made a more constructive contribution, although she made a commendable attempt to match Christine Grahame's tone. I share her concern for the low paid and for rural areas in Scotland. It is important to remember that rural authorities will continue to benefit from their share of the £318 million community regeneration fund.

Linda Fabiani mentioned the proliferation of funds and initiatives. I have some sympathy with her point. However, she should recall that, as a result of today's statement, we are going to work to align funds. We have already brought together three separate funds in the community regeneration fund.

Everything that we are talking about is to do with investing in our areas that have experienced decline and difficulty. The issue is not simply to do with bringing life into old buildings, such as the fantastic grade A listed sugar warehouse in Inverclyde. That is important in our attempts to regenerate areas, but the aspect that is more important is that of people. We have to bring the heart back into our communities.

We could focus investment only on areas of opportunity and success. People of a Conservative mentality often suggest that we should back only winners and success stories. We could look for the allocation of many more

greenfield sites. We could turn our backs on the more difficult redevelopment opportunities that exist. However, that would be quite wrong. We need a balanced approach that focuses on some of the areas of greatest difficulty around Scotland.

We need to learn from the lessons of the past. Alex Neil mentioned the GEER initiative, which is mentioned at the heart of our document. We need to learn that there are economic challenges relating to the employment issues that he focused on that need to be tackled as well as the bricks-and-mortar issues of regeneration.

To achieve that, we need much better joined-up working involving not only me, as the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Malcolm Chisholm and others in the Executive but Scottish Enterprise, Communities Scotland and other public agencies, such as local authorities and the health boards. Indeed, as we saw yesterday, the local colleges are important in this regard. Skills are at the heart of what we are trying to do and, in many instances, the renewal of colleges' estates across Scotland can place them at the heart of the opportunities for redevelopment.

I would like to ensure that we do not cut corners or downgrade the investment. We must lift our sights and have quality new investment and quality new proposals as a result of this regeneration initiative.

It was like a breath of fresh air to get to Euan Robson's speech. It was uplifting to hear that the Borders has benefited from regeneration projects. It is important to emphasise that regeneration should be happening throughout Scotland, whether in the Borders, the Highlands or indeed in my city, Aberdeen, where there are big opportunities for regeneration, such as the waterfront project in Torry.

Yesterday, I saw the opportunities in Inverclyde. I believe that there is a huge opportunity to get things right for that area, which will have an immense impact on the communities and the people of Inverclyde. Karen Whitefield spoke appropriately and passionately about the improvements that have been, and continue to be, delivered at Petersburn.

Sandra White, sadly, took us back to the "It's Scotland's oil" debates of the 1970s. The SNP always likes to take us back to that time because it is the last time that the SNP had electoral success. *[Interruption.]* I remind Christine Grahame that that was 30 years ago or more.

Susan Deacon made a very good contribution and reminded us of the progress that has been made. There has been big progress already. Some £20 million has been invested in Craigmillar, Raploch and Clydebank through the three pathfinder urban regeneration companies. Much is

made of the importance of urban regeneration companies. I do not say that they are essential, but they make a big and important difference. They assist with the dealings with the private sector and the co-ordination of the public sector contribution and the approach has worked successfully both in Scotland and in other parts of the UK. I agree with Susan Deacon's points on geographic issues and her points on leadership, which is crucial.

Mary Scanlon: I positively and constructively ask the minister what talks he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the planning gain supplement. Is the minister in favour of the proposal?

Nicol Stephen: My officials have been discussing the matter with the Treasury and the Executive will make representations on it soon.

Much of the debate was backward looking, but Patrick Harvie made a good speech and took us to the future. In what is now an unusual step for the Green party, he criticised the SNP's amendment. There was much tutting and muttering at that point, especially from Linda Fabiani, but Alex Neil did not look surprised. Indeed, given what he said in his speech, he probably agreed with Patrick Harvie's point. It is clear that Alex Neil delegated the drafting of today's SNP amendment to Christine Grahame and that he felt uncomfortable with its retrospective negativity throughout.

I have already touched on joined-up working between ministers and departments, but Donald Gorrie's point about that is exactly right. I agree that we should not take a top-down approach to regeneration. Regeneration should be about a new form of localism and involvement at the community level. If there is to be regeneration, we must encourage local initiative and help people rather than just help buildings and corporations.

Margaret Jamieson made a good speech, but it is sad that, at that point, the strength of commitment to regeneration in the chamber was demonstrated by the fact that the SNP had only two members present and the Tories had only one. It is always important to reflect one's commitment to issues by being present when they are debated in the chamber. We are criticised for not bringing forward debates on important issues. When important issues are debated, members should take the opportunity to be in the chamber.

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): We were short this afternoon because, due to pressures on debating time, I agreed to withdraw from the debate. It is totally inappropriate for the minister to make snide comments of that nature without knowing the facts.

Nicol Stephen: The member's excuse is now on the record.

Frances Curran gave one of her typically cheerful contributions. In it, she told us that she agrees with Prince Charles. She then accused the Executive of paternalism and interference in people's lives. That was from the Trotskyists—I rest my case.

Thank goodness for Duncan McNeil—

Frances Curran: Will the minister take an intervention?

Nicol Stephen: I will take no more interventions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): One minute.

Nicol Stephen: I am about to end.

All that I have to say is thank goodness for Duncan McNeil. He took the fight to Christine Grahame and introduced much-needed balance to the negativity. He was right to be positive about the new urban regeneration corporation for Inverclyde and the wide and strong support for its launch in his area yesterday.

Murdo Fraser complained about a lack of time; I am running out of time—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are rather.

Nicol Stephen: I am about to cut my remarks dramatically short. I hoped that Murdo Fraser would understand one simple point: the reasons for much, but not all, of the decline, decay and depression around Scotland were the Tories' policies throughout 18 damaging years. That is why we need regeneration, which the Conservatives will never properly understand.

As I suggested, Alex Neil made a good speech. I agreed with much of what he said and it is a pity that the SNP amendment did not reflect that. Investment is crucial and we want to lever in more private sector investment. That is at the heart of the policy statement, which I ask members to support.

Business Motions

17:01

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-4041, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 8 March 2006

2.30 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Executive Debate: International Women's Day
followed by Business Motion
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 9 March 2006

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
 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 Executive Debate: Agriculture Strategy
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 15 March 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 16 March 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
Lyon.]

Members' Business.—[George

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not think that Mr Chisholm intended to press his request-to-speak button, but his name is on my screen. Does he wish to speak against the motion?

The Minister for Communities (Malcolm Chisholm) *indicated disagreement.*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No member having asked to speak against the motion, the question is, that motion S2M-4041, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motions S2M-4033 and S2M-4034, in the name of Margaret Curran, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out timetables for legislation.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Bill at Stage 2 be completed by 24 March 2006.

That the Parliament agrees that the timetable for completion of consideration of the Scottish Commissioner for Human Rights Bill at Stage 1 be extended to 28 April 2006.—[George Lyon.]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:03

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Lyon to move motion S2M-4030, on the designation of a lead committee; motions S2M-4031 and S2M-4032, on the approval of statutory instruments; and motion S2M-4035, on the establishment of a committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Criminal Proceedings etc. (Reform) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Transfer of Functions from the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority and the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive to the West of Scotland Transport Partnership Order 2006 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Older and Disabled Persons (Scotland) Order 2006 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees to establish a committee of the Parliament as follows:

Name of Committee: Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee;

Remit: To consider and report to the Parliament on the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill;

Duration: Until the Bill has received Royal Assent, falls or is withdrawn;

Convenership: The Convener and the Deputy Convener will be members of the Labour Party;

Membership: Mr Andrew Arbuckle, Marlyn Glen, Margaret Jamieson, Michael Matheson, Mr Brian Monteith.—[George Lyon.]

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

Decision Time

17:04

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):

There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S2M-4024.1, in the name of Christine Grahame, which seeks to amend motion S2M-4024, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on regeneration, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (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)
Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (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)
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)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)

Glen, Marlyn (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)
 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)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 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)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 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)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 26, Against 78, Abstentions 10.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S2M-4024.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S2M-4024, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on regeneration, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 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)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

AGAINST

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)

Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Mr Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 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, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 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)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 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)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 40, Against 74, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-4024, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, on regeneration, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Arbuckle, Mr Andrew (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (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, Marlyn (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)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 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)
 Swinburne, John (Central Scotland) (SSCUP)
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Curran, Frances (West of Scotland) (SSP)
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
 Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leckie, Carolyn (Central Scotland) (SSP)
 Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Ind)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 44, Abstentions 6.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the Scottish Executive's statement "People and Place: Regeneration Policy in Scotland"; notes the current support for the regeneration of communities across Scotland; supports the commitment from the Executive and its agencies to work with local authorities and other partners to ensure that communities benefit from economic activity and

to attract further investment from the private sector, and welcomes the Executive's determination to tackle those land, property and other issues that can act as a barrier to regeneration and to create successful, mixed and vibrant communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-4030, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the Criminal Proceedings etc. (Reform) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Unless any member objects, I propose to put a single question on motions S2M-4031 and S2M-4032, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

There being no objections, the question is, that motions S2M-4031 and S2M-4032, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Transfer of Functions from the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority and the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive to the West of Scotland Transport Partnership Order 2006 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Older and Disabled Persons (Scotland) Order 2006 be approved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S2M-4035, in the name of Margaret Curran, on the establishment of a committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to establish a committee of the Parliament as follows:

Name of Committee: Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill Committee;

Remit: To consider and report to the Parliament on the Glasgow Airport Rail Link Bill;

Duration: Until the Bill has received Royal Assent, falls or is withdrawn;

Convenership: The Convener and the Deputy Convener will be members of the Labour Party;

Membership: Mr Andrew Arbuckle, Marlyn Glen, Margaret Jamieson, Michael Matheson, Mr Brian Monteith.

North Ayrshire Council Public-Private Partnership Schools Project

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S2M-3810, in the name of Campbell Martin, on North Ayrshire Council's public-private partnership for schools project.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that North Ayrshire Council, through a PPP project, intends to amalgamate St Andrew's Academy in Saltcoats with St Michael's Academy in Kilwinning and to build a "superschool" to be erected on Laighdykes playing fields in Saltcoats, the only playing fields serving the towns of Saltcoats and Ardrossan; is concerned that the council's plans will impact adversely on the educational attainment of pupils and on the provision of open space and sports pitches in Saltcoats and Ardrossan; is further concerned that questions remain over aspects of the bidding and procurement processes adopted by North Ayrshire Council in its PPP for Schools Project, and considers that public private partnerships do not represent best value for local taxpayers and local communities.

17:10

Campbell Martin (West of Scotland) (Ind): I thank those members who have supported the motion and who have decided to stay behind and take part in the debate. I record my thanks to the people of Saltcoats and Ardrossan, who have made clear their opposition to the plans of North Ayrshire Council. I thank in particular the members of the Laighdykes residents group, who have been prepared to stand up and fight for what they believe in and what they think is right, and to face down the arrogance of North Ayrshire Council.

There are many strands to the North Ayrshire Council PPP project. I apologise for not being able to address them all in the limited time available. I know that other colleagues will refer to other aspects, but I wish to refer in particular to the administration and scrutiny of the PPP project. The project is the subject of a continuing inquiry by Strathclyde police, so there are some aspects of the matter that I will not go into in any detail.

As far as the administration and scrutiny of the North Ayrshire PPP are concerned, we need to look back at what has happened since it came into being. The European Union procurement regulations stipulate that there should be a minimum of five "economic operators", as they are called, tendering for public contracts. That requirement is now incorporated in Scots law in the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (SSI 2006/1). There is scope in those regulations to have fewer than five bidders, and that is, of course, the case with North Ayrshire Council. In

fact, there have only ever been two identified bidders: one was Comprehensive Estate Services and the other was the First Class consortium.

Let us take Comprehensive Estate Services first. North Ayrshire Council publicly announced that Comprehensive Estate Services was a subsidiary of the Singapore-based CPG International. We pointed out to North Ayrshire Council that CPG International is in fact an Italy-based computer printer company, and the council responded by saying that it actually meant CPG Corporation, which is indeed based in Singapore. Unfortunately for North Ayrshire Council, when I wrote to the chief executive of CPG Corporation, he wrote back to say that Comprehensive Estate Services was not a subsidiary of his company, nor were there any cross-shareholdings.

North Ayrshire Council was not deterred and decided to pursue the bid, judging that it was apparently credible. We can see that Comprehensive Estate Services has no experience in the construction industry and no experience of PPP contracts. It had, and still has, no functioning office—although the receptionist at a chartered accountant's in Strathmiglo in Fife will take a message for the company if anybody really wants to push it. At the time of bidding, Comprehensive Estate Services had no accounts submitted with Companies House. It had a credit rating of zero and a company alert that said:

"this company should be treated with a degree of caution".

Nevertheless, North Ayrshire Council told us that the bid was credible. I have with me the pre-qualification questionnaire that was submitted by Comprehensive Estate Services to North Ayrshire Council. Unfortunately, most of it was downloaded from the websites of other companies. The insurance documents, which are a prerequisite, refer to CPG in Singapore, not Comprehensive Estate Services. Most of those documents were out of date anyway. Furthermore, the PQQ was signed the year before Comprehensive Estate Services was incorporated as a company.

Nobody noticed those flaws. The documentation was supposedly scrutinised by North Ayrshire Council, the Scottish Executive's financial partnerships unit and Partnerships UK in London, yet nobody noticed any of the flaws that I have mentioned, and it was decided that North Ayrshire Council could proceed.

There was only ever one genuine bid for the North Ayrshire Council PPP, so it was no surprise that Comprehensive Estate Services was ruled out. In June 2005, North Ayrshire Council announced that the First Class consortium was to be the preferred bidder. It goes without saying that a major role must have been played by North

Ayrshire Council's financial advisers in determining that the First Class consortium bid was a good deal and that it was good value for money. North Ayrshire Council's financial adviser in the PPP project is Ernst & Young.

Also in June 2005, a press release was issued by an organisation called PFI Infrastructure Company plc. No one had ever heard of it before; it is not mentioned in any documents about the PPP project from North Ayrshire Council. That press release said that that company was the preferred bidder for the North Ayrshire Council contract. It also claimed that it was part of the First Class consortium, but nowhere is that mentioned. In fact, the company is based on the Isle of Man and is managed and administered by Quayle Munro Holdings plc, which is part of the First Class consortium.

No contract has been signed between North Ayrshire Council and the preferred bidder. The police investigation might play a part in that; I do not know. A company has, however, been formed to take on the construction once the contract is signed. That company is called PPP (North Ayrshire) Ltd. Its two listed directors are employees of Quayle Munro and it is managed and administered by Quayle Munro. So Quayle Munro is part of the First Class consortium, which is the preferred bidder as announced by North Ayrshire Council. Quayle Munro manages the Isle of Man company PFI Infrastructure Company plc, which claims to be the preferred bidder for North Ayrshire Council's PPP contract. Quayle Munro also provides the directors and management for PPP (North Ayrshire) Ltd, which will take on the contract when the project gets to construction stage. That is an £80 million contract. The financial auditor of Quayle Munro and PFI Infrastructure Company plc is Ernst & Young.

The facts are therefore that on one side is Ernst & Young as the financial adviser to North Ayrshire Council, playing what must be a major part in determining that this is a great deal and gives the best value, and on the other side, Ernst & Young is employed by companies that are making a direct profit from the decisions taken by North Ayrshire Council on which Ernst & Young were employed to advise.

As parliamentarians, we have to ask whether that is appropriate and acceptable. I think that the North Ayrshire Council PPP contract stinks to high heaven. Local democracy is being trampled, the academic needs of local children are being ignored and local communities are being robbed of open space and playing fields. I fear that North Ayrshire Council has exposed a situation that could be replicated across Scotland and, indeed, across the United Kingdom. The Executive can no longer pretend that it cannot see what is

happening; it is obvious, and North Ayrshire Council has exposed it.

I ask the minister to take the points that have been raised tonight back to his Executive colleagues and to take the debate as a starting point. We must investigate and fully address the points that have been raised tonight. We owe it to honesty, to democracy, to openness and accountability, but primarily to the people of Saltcoats and Ardrossan.

17:18

Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Campbell Martin on securing tonight's debate. I do not intend to add my comments on the financing of the PPP deal, although what he said concerns me a great deal.

I am more familiar with the Laighdykes situation, even though it is not in my region, because I met some of the campaigners during a successful fight to save the old racecourse in Ayr from development. The two cases are similar because the Ayr proposal was for the building of a school on common good land that had been used for generations by the people of Ayr for recreational purposes.

At Laighdykes, as in Ayr, there is an obvious conflict of interest with North Ayrshire Council acting as planning authority, as education authority and as de facto landowner. With the advent of PPPs, such cases where the council is perceived to be riding roughshod over planning safeguards to pursue an internal political or financial agenda are becoming commonplace.

I note that sportscotland provided a briefing for this debate that downplayed the loss of the playing fields at Laighdykes. However, that position is at odds with the view of sportscotland's acting chief executive. Last year in response to a Public Petitions Committee request for information on the nationwide situation with PPPs, he stated:

"Sportscotland is concerned about the amount of development pressure that current PPP proposals are placing on playingfields. The dual influence of the affordability gap & the determination of local authorities to take the opportunity that PPP presents means that they are determined to press ahead with such proposals in most cases".

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Robert Brown): Does Adam Ingram accept that that has no relationship to the particular circumstances that we are supposed to be debating? They must stand, like others, on their merits.

Mr Ingram: I certainly do not accept that proposition. I believe that that statement is relevant. A hectare of recreational open space will be lost to the people of Ardrossan and Saltcoats.

The acting chief executive of sportscotland might have added in his letter—but he did not—that the Scottish ministers are unlikely to block any such developments that are referred to them, given their total commitment to PPPs. The sportscotland response concluded that in these circumstances it felt constrained not to object, but to seek concessions or reach compromises. The acting chief executive wanted to refer those concerns to the relevant committee of the Scottish Parliament for it to investigate and find a solution.

Far too many green spaces and playing fields are being lost because of the Executive's PPP policies. These issues need to be addressed and not avoided. I hope that the ministers take this opportunity to do so.

17:22

Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab): As is customary on these occasions, I congratulate Mr Campbell Martin on securing the debate—not least because it enables me, as an elected member from the locality in question, to put on record the facts of the issue as opposed to Mr Campbell Martin's unfounded allegations. It is obviously legitimate—

Campbell Martin: What I have said tonight can be founded and I can prove it.

Allan Wilson: I believe that the allegations he has made are the subject of police investigation. I am sure that the police will arbitrate in the matter.

It is legitimate for Campbell Martin, and others, to campaign for or against particular proposals. However, when misrepresentation, innuendo, personal attacks and downright untruths substitute for argument, I believe the line has been crossed beyond which no credibility can be given to Mr Campbell Martin's comments.

Adam Ingram spoke about the loss of 1 hectare of land. I will quote what sportscotland said on the matter.

"The proposals by North Ayrshire Council will not result in the reduction in the number of grass pitches available and will also provide a new full-size, floodlit, synthetic grass pitch and a polymeric, all weather, athletic track, which on completion will be the only all weather athletics track in North Ayrshire. The grass pitches are to be upgraded, which in itself will allow greater use of existing provision ...

There will also be new changing accommodation for the pitches and new indoor sports facilities for the school. All of these facilities will remain open to the public and it is sportscotland's view that these proposals will significantly improve the provision of facilities in the three towns area. Whilst not within our remit as a Statutory Consultee, the grass area will remain fully open to the public as 'open space' and it is our understanding the NPFA made no objection in relation to North Ayrshire Council's proposals.

In addition, as part of the overall proposals North Ayrshire Council are also bringing back into use 3 pitches,

with new changing accommodation, in the Ardeer area of Stevenston, which lies approximately 2 miles to the South of Laighdykes. Given this, there is a significant improvement in both the quantity and quality of pitch provision in the three towns area."

That is why sportscotland supported the proposals.

PPP in North Ayrshire is probably one of the best things that ever happened to the area. It gave us the James Watt College building, which Mr Martin opposed and without which the area would be without any further education provision to speak of. I do not believe that there are any of the unanswered questions to which the motion refers. The facilities that North Ayrshire Council proposes will be a marked improvement on those that currently exist and will provide future generations of three towns residents and their children with a markedly improved educational facility that I know will be welcomed by people in my constituency.

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance. Mr Wilson, who is a deputy minister, referred in his speech to "downright untruths", which is a serious allegation. In effect, he called Campbell Martin a liar. I do not think that that is acceptable under the Parliament's standing orders. I ask you to advise Mr Wilson to withdraw the remark.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise members to be careful about their language. However, Mr Wilson was trying to remain within the bounds of decency when he made his remark.

17:26

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con): Given that Campbell Martin referred to Ernst & Young, I should mention that I am a former employee of that organisation, albeit that I was never involved in PPP schemes either in North Ayrshire or anywhere else.

I will not address the specific local issues that Campbell Martin raised but, as he said at the end of his speech, a wide range of general points arising from PPP schemes apply throughout the country. I would like to talk about those issues this evening.

The motion ends with the bald statement

"that public private partnerships do not represent best value for local taxpayers and local communities."

I do not agree. If the motion had said that they do not necessarily represent best value, I would have been more comfortable with it. It is important that we are not driven down an ideological road.

We should not think that PPP schemes are necessarily best value for money. Equally, we should not think that traditional methods of

procurement are entirely without merit. We should seek to identify the method of public procurement that is most appropriate to the individual circumstances of each project, whether it involves a school, a hospital or another item.

The value for money test is crucial. It is really about ensuring that the balance of risk and reward between the private and public sector is appropriate. There have been occasions—not just in Scotland, but south of the border, too—when that balance has not been appropriate and the private sector has had the opportunity to have the reward without sharing the degree of risk that would be ideal under a PPP scheme. However, there is a place for PPP.

Some of the concerns that have been expressed in relation to the North Ayrshire scheme sound reasonably similar to concerns that have been expressed about schemes in the South of Scotland region. I wonder whether at the moment PPP schemes are sufficiently flexible to respond to the desires of local parents and councils. I feel that people are often pushed down a particular line and forced to do certain things by the school model that exists under PPP.

As some members may be aware, there is at the moment a great deal of controversy about PPP in the Borders. Parents in Peebles are effectively being told that if they do not accept one site for a new school the money will go to an alternative location in the region, but outside Peebles. That is a real issue in relation to giving parents choice about the type of school that they want their children to attend. We should consider whether the current PPP model is sufficiently flexible.

Adam Ingram mentioned the impact on playing fields. That impact is an important concern. An audit that we all received towards the end of last year raised concerns about the impact on playing fields. Those of us who were fortunate enough to be educated in areas where there were sufficient playing fields—whether or not we made much use of them—might struggle to understand the difficulties that exist in urban areas of Scotland in preserving a sufficient number of playing fields.

We must ensure that, whatever method of procurement is used for schools, playing fields are not needlessly destroyed—particularly not to make way for land usage for other purposes. An obligation to go down whatever route is best for the education of children should be built into the PPP guidelines. Perhaps it is, but if it is, it is certainly not given sufficient emphasis.

My fundamental point is that PPP schemes are not necessarily flawed, but their implementation can be. It is important that we get the guidance right. If the guidance is toughened up and made more flexible, perhaps such schemes can play a

better part in the provision of public services in Scotland than they have done to date.

17:31

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I will leave the debating of the details of the problems in North Ayrshire to the local MSPs; I will make some observations on what makes a good PPP project and what makes a poor PPP project.

I make no apologies for repeating one or two comments that I have previously made in the chamber. There is merit in repeating oneself on PPP developments.

A good PPP development is one where local communities are properly consulted; children are involved in the design of the school, such as at Acharacle in the Highlands; parents and teachers are involved in the discussions and the design; and the local community is fully consulted. A poor PPP project is one where few or none of those things happen.

What concerns me most in general about PPP projects is that in far too many cases there is a loss of community amenity space—common-good land—which is taken over and managed in such a way that the local community is effectively excluded from casual use of the land, in particular for children's play. The substitution of green open space with formal all-weather pitches all too often ends up with the formal pitches coming under the control of the school or the PPP project people and the pitches are made available to people only on application. They must fill in forms and all the rest of it to get a licence to play on them. The pitches cease to be casual space that people can use at any time during the day.

I might return to the design of PPP schools tomorrow in the architecture debate. The Executive has issued quite good guidelines for the design of PPP schools and the incorporation of the best of environmental design—by the way, I remind the minister that research that was done a few years ago showed that schools that were managed and designed to high environmental standards could produce up to a 10 per cent increase in the children's performance in mathematics and English. That is a very important point: the design of the schools produced that improvement in performance. It concerns me that what was not incorporated in volume 3 of the advice for PPP contracts—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Harper, the debate is about PPP in North Ayrshire, but I am not getting that feeling from what you are saying. You should stick to the subject of the motion.

Robin Harper: Well, I will conclude my remarks, but I did say when I started that this is what I was

going to say, so I could have been challenged then. I said that I would make general remarks on what makes a good, or a poor, PPP.

I will conclude by saying that I hope the general concerns about PPP come to the fore in the discussion about the project to which the motion refers.

17:35

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I register an interest in the debate as a parent of a child who attends one of the schools involved in North Ayrshire's proposed PPP project. I guess that in doing so I feel particularly attuned to the views of parents in the school in my area—Greenwood academy. I think that I am able to represent the views of those parents.

I have to say that I feel a little bit uncomfortable speaking in a members' business debate on a motion on an issue about which there is, I understand, an outstanding police investigation. I am not sure how to deal with that. I understand that there have been persistent accusations in the national and local press, some of which have been reported to the police. I am aware that the police are investigating the matter and that a report to the procurator fiscal is imminent.

I genuinely hope that should the report to the procurator fiscal prove what explorations of previous accusations have found—that there is no case to answer—we can move on. I think that that is what parents—certainly those in my area—want to do. I hope that I can get an assurance from Campbell Martin tonight that that is what he is willing to do should the report conclude that there is no case to answer. Obviously, we are speculating on that at this point and I feel a little bit uncomfortable about that, so I will turn to the project itself.

The project will create four new schools that will provide state-of-the-art educational facilities for almost 4,000 pupils in North Ayrshire. As a result, there will be wider curricular choice and the latest, hi-tech facilities for science, language learning, sport and the performing arts. There will also be the renewed enthusiasm, motivation and energy that the new teaching and learning environment will bring. We have only to think about our move from the Mound into this building to realise how important and motivating a new environment can be. Many of the speeches in this chamber when we first moved here were about raising our game and doing things better. I expect that the new schools will have that effect on pupils and teachers in North Ayrshire.

I have asked ministers in parliamentary questions in the chamber whether Greenwood academy would conform to eco-school standards

and have been encouraged by the responses, because I have been advised that it will. That means not only that it will be energy efficient in terms of heating, lighting and insulation, but that it will complement the safer routes to schools initiative by setting up bicycle racks, storage space and so on to encourage more young people to take exercise and cycle to school.

I appreciate Robin Harper's points about a bottom-up approach and consulting people. As a parent of a child who attends Greenwood academy, I received a letter about the PPP project and was given information about the potential design and asked to express my views on it. I hope that that will take care of one or two of the points that Robin raised.

Allan Wilson dealt with the points about open space and sports provision. I think that all the new schools will bring sports provision into the 21st century. I understand that, as well as athletics tracks and sports pitches, there will be extensive indoor facilities, including dance studios and fitness suites, which will bring physical education into the 21st century.

When a £10 million private finance initiative educational investment was proposed in my constituency, many people in the chamber opposed it. It now provides the highest quality education for more than 2,000 students in my area, and it provides jobs at James Watt College in North Ayrshire.

I welcome the proposals as they stand. They will bring undeniable benefits—not to today's generation, but to future generations of North Ayrshire's young people.

17:40

Mr Stewart Maxwell (West of Scotland) (SNP): As other members have done, I congratulate Campbell Martin on securing this extremely important debate. He covered some of the concerns over the North Ayrshire schools PPP project very well. It is not just that there was only one bidder, although that is all too common in PPP projects throughout the country; when there should be many bidders creating competition that drives down prices, often there is only one.

The Lighthikes action group and others have expressed many concerns about the project. As I said, Campbell Martin dealt with many of them. Despite what Allan Wilson said, many people in the community are concerned about the project and residents in the area will be paying for it for years and years, even for decades. As we all know, that is the nature of PFI/PPP projects.

To echo a point that was made by another member, it is not unusual for councils to take

decisions on projects of which they will be the beneficiaries. Across the country, concerns are expressed when planning permission is granted for projects from which the local council will benefit. I have received many communications, not just from the Saltcoats and Ardrossan area about this particular project, but from all over the west of Scotland about that kind of process.

Despite what some others have said, there will be a loss of playing fields. There will be a loss of 1 hectare of open land and a loss of facilities. Like Irene Oldfather, I welcome replacements and improvements for sporting facilities such as all-weather pitches and track, which are great, but the history of PFI/PPP projects shows that the problem is not only the loss of open land—to which Robin Harper referred—but the loss of access. Often, fees are introduced and regularly raised and become a barrier to access to the facilities. Not only are fees raised, but the amount of time that is allowed for access is reduced.

Irene Oldfather: I want to put on record the information that I have. The new school will take up less ground than the building that it will replace, and the number of sports pitches in the area will increase rather than decrease. The field will continue to be open freely to the public on an informal basis. That information has been placed on record.

Mr Maxwell: Sportscotland says that 1 hectare will be lost; it accepts that fact, despite what the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning read from his letter, although I am sure that he read accurately. Sportscotland's view is on the record. There will be a loss. Irene Oldfather also misses the point that I was making: the loss is not just of land, but of free or low-cost access for community groups. Prices will go through the roof. We are not talking just about a loss of overall area.

Parliament tries to promote an ethos of fitness among young people and it tries to highlight problems with obesity. Irene Oldfather talked about campaigns to encourage people to cycle or walk to school, but surely the superschool idea goes against such campaigns. Because of the distances that are involved, many more children will be driven to school by car and many more children will take the bus than is the case at present. We will see more congestion and pollution, and fewer children walking to school. What is the point of a walk to school campaign when some projects are leading us in the opposite direction? All we are doing is making things worse rather than better.

I have received many letters and e-mails on this subject from people in the Saltcoats and Ardrossan area. It is right that Campbell Martin has pursued it—very effectively—in the area. I

congratulate him on bringing the debate to Parliament.

17:44

Frances Curran (West of Scotland) (SSP): In principle, the Scottish Executive has a strong commitment to protecting green space, but PPP schools projects represent one of the biggest threats to Scotland's green space and open space. It is an irony that the hundreds of thousands of young people who use that green space and open space every day for play will lose big sections of it so that they can get new schools or have their existing schools modernised. Play is the subject of tomorrow night's members' business debate; everyone agrees that play is important, but the approach to encouraging it is not joined up.

Thirty councils and 268 schools are involved in PPP projects that will result in the loss of 320 acres of space. I do not know what an acre is, but 320 acres is the equivalent of 180 full-size football pitches. That is the consequence of using PPPs to fund refurbishment and new schools in Scotland. The Executive is presiding over an approach that is absolute madness. If it delays intervention any longer, it will be too late to stop what is happening.

The consultation process on the loss of space is a farce; it is not effective in protecting open space. The Holmhill Wood community park action group commissioned its own research.

Robert Brown: Will the member give way?

Frances Curran: No—I have only four minutes.

The Holmhill Wood community park action group report found that

"in some local authorities Councillors and senior Council officials are prepared to flout planning guidance, hide information and mislead the public in order to get PPP projects approved."

That will come as no surprise to some members.

In their initial bids for PPP schemes, the construction companies do not mention housing development or the sell-off of land, which they intend to use to make their proposals more profitable. Such practice takes place when there are two, three, four or five bidders, never mind when there is only one bidder, as is the case in North Ayrshire. Once a company wins a contract, it submits a variant bid that includes the sell-off of land and the development of luxury homes.

Leaving aside the loss of land at Laighdykes—which is a huge issue for the local community—the proposal is madness and it is no wonder that the community is up in arms about it. Educational attainment at St Andrew's academy is higher than it is at the school next door. The new school, which will be called St Matthew's, will be on the

site of the playing fields. There will be a school next door. Together, those schools will have a roll of 3,000 pupils. Stewart Maxwell is right—the council is talking about 20 buses coming in every morning. The site of St Andrew's academy will become a car park and dropping-off point. It is lunacy to propose such a concentration of young people separated by a very small playing field.

I had read about the case in the paper, but I have been shocked by what Campbell Martin has told us. It is breathtaking to hear what is happening in local government. I await with interest the outcome of the report to the procurator fiscal. Here we go again—once more, a Labour council has got into bed with private companies. There is more than a whiff of corruption about events so far. We are talking about the selling off of public land to luxury-home developers who will make bumper profits for their shareholders. As usual, young people and local communities will pay the price—they will lose their Laighdykes playing fields—and then the council will complain about young people hanging about the streets and will impose dispersal orders. You could not make it up; what has gone on sounds like a script from “Yes, Minister”.

17:48

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): My involvement in the debate is principally a matter of courtesy. Protesters contacted me about the proposals for the Ardrossan/Saltcoats site during a campaign against a similar development in South Ayrshire. As Adam Ingram said, it was suggested that a PPP project would take away valuable playing space. With that project, I felt that there was a lack of definition. I am not against all such projects—I can see advantages in them, because we need new schools—but with that project there was no guarantee that space or access for sporting activity would be retained. Such a guarantee is again lacking in relation to North Ayrshire Council's project.

I congratulate Campbell Martin. All the work that he has done was evident in the information that he presented in his speech. The question whether there is a foundation to what he says will have to be left to the police and the procurator fiscal to determine. In saying that, I take nothing away from his efforts.

Allan Wilson, the Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, made a suggestion in his speech that perplexed me slightly. He said that PPPs are effectively the best thing since sliced bread. I can think back to the time when the Labour Party condemned us Conservatives for having the audacity to suggest PPP schemes of any kind. I am delighted that a Labour minister

such as Allan Wilson has been converted and that he now sees the Conservative way ahead.

Allan Wilson: Does Phil Gallie accept that the PPP projects that the Labour Administration introduced post 1997 bear no relationship whatever to their PFI counterparts, not least because the assets revert to public ownership?

Phil Gallie: No, I do not accept that. For example, I recollect that the PFI hospital at Stonehaven will revert to public ownership in due course. I will return to the issue in North Ayrshire; I do not want to get bogged down in the PPP/PFI issue.

As a former councillor in North Ayrshire, I recognise the importance of the Laighdykes playing fields to the people of Ardrossan and Saltcoats. The land is effectively the only available public playing space and it is widely used. My fear is that the lack of definition in the PPP will mean that all the land will be lost. I accept that a couple of football pitches will be provided down at Ardeer, but Ardeer is 2 miles away from the proposed new school.

We talk about children and obesity. In that regard, we want kids to have open access to playing fields. We want to encourage that. My fear is that, in respect of this project, children will not get the access that they need.

17:52

The Deputy Minister for Education and Young People (Robert Brown): I congratulate Campbell Martin on securing the debate on North Ayrshire Council's schools PPP. However, we have to distinguish between two types of issue that have been raised in the debate: the generalised attack that was made on PPP from some predictable quarters and the genuine points that were raised about individual PPPs, either in the Ardrossan and Saltcoats area or elsewhere.

There is nothing new about issues to do with land use arising in this regard, as the same issues arose in previous public procurement practice. Where does anyone imagine that the sites for new schools were found in the past? The practice of using land in this way is not new and is entirely in line with previous practice.

A number of genuine issues were raised in the debate, such as the use of sports land and open land, the involvement of parents and children—Robin Harper touched on that issue—and the flexibility or otherwise of PPPs. Other debates will have to be held on those issues.

I found it extremely depressing that such a negative, gurning motion on such a positive subject is before the chamber today. We are in the middle of a huge programme to improve Scotland's

school buildings through a combination of public-private partnerships and other procurement methods. In one way or another, the Executive is providing financial support to all Scotland's authorities so that they can move forward with their priorities—decided locally—for making schools fit for the 21st century.

Phil Gallie: Will the minister give way?

Robert Brown: I will move on a bit, if I may.

In North Ayrshire, the capital value of the schools programme, of which the new Saltcoats school is a part, is something of the order of £107 million. Whether the school is procured under PPP or another arrangement, it is for the local authority to specify its requirements, to take account of the wider public interests and, indeed, to be accountable to its electors. In proposing changes of this kind, councils such as North Ayrshire have to take account of a range of issues, including the nature of existing buildings and future roll projections. Many of these decisions are difficult, given that they are taking place against a background of declining school rolls.

In this instance, the council also wants to secure the long-term future of Roman Catholic education for the whole of North Ayrshire within the best possible educational environment. Again, the decision is one for the council to take.

Mr Ingram: The minister talks about securing the best possible environment for Roman Catholic education. However, in the situation that we are discussing, there will be only one Roman Catholic secondary school in North Ayrshire, which means that children will have to travel long distances every day to access a school. Furthermore, we are sacrificing good schools that have widely recognised attainment levels.

Robert Brown: I acknowledge that there are dilemmas in that regard, but such dilemmas arise throughout the country in a variety of situations. Local decisions must be made with regard to best value for money and the availability of facilities to local people.

Campbell Martin's motion makes three points. First, it refers in condemnatory fashion to the new school as the proposed "superschool". I hope that the school will be a super school in the best sense. Throughout Scotland, the Executive has provided the means and the additional teachers and facilities for many superb schools. In Saltcoats, the Executive, North Ayrshire Council and parents, staff and young people want a new, modern, dynamic school that will be ambitious and excellent and that will provide modern facilities and a broad curriculum and subject choice. Irene Oldfather commented on local provision in that regard. Let us be done with the relentlessly negative attitudes of Campbell Martin and, for

once, take pride in what we are doing in Scottish education and in the great generation of young people who are coming through our schools.

Phil Gallie: Will the minister give way?

Robert Brown: I have already taken an intervention.

Secondly, Campbell Martin's motion castigates the alleged loss of open space and sports pitches. Allan Wilson quoted from a letter from sportscotland, which made the situation clear. It is unusual for sportscotland to go out of its way to distance itself from a motion in a parliamentary debate. It is clear that there was a separate process to consider the planning and land use aspects of the school development proposal and that primary responsibility for the protection of such amenities lies with local authorities. The Executive's role is to provide the legislative framework and guidance and advice to local authorities on how to fulfil that commitment. That is why we have national planning policy guideline 11, which is currently being reviewed and modernised.

As members know, sportscotland is a statutory consultee on proposals for development on playing fields and performs that role with rigour. If sportscotland objects to a development, the case must be referred to the Scottish ministers for consideration. Sportscotland did not object to the proposals that we are debating. The National Playing Fields Association did not object, either. Indeed, sportscotland supports the proposals, because it thinks that they will deliver significant improvements in the provision of sports facilities for school and community use, as indeed they will.

Sportscotland points out that, far from detracting from open space and sports provision, the development will lead to no reduction in grass pitches. Indeed, grass pitches will be upgraded and a new full-size, floodlit, synthetic grass pitch will be created—perhaps that accounts for the change of use of one hectare out of 15 hectares of open space. There will also be new indoor sports facilities and three pitches will be brought back into use in Ardeer, only 2 miles away. I cannot judge the quality of the local provision being made, but perhaps members will draw their own conclusions.

Campbell Martin: How many of the pitches that the minister mentioned will be fenced off from the public and in how many will the public be charged for use?

Robert Brown: As I said, that is a matter for the council, which is accountable to the local electorate. That is why a debate of this nature in the Parliament raises difficulties.

The third point that Campbell Martin's motion makes, on which he spent most of his speech, relates to the alleged questions over the bidding and procurement processes for the project. I am aware that the member has made a number of allegations in various quarters—without too much success up to now. North Ayrshire Council is the procuring body for the schools PPP project and as such has a responsibility to ensure that the correct procurement procedures have been followed. It is not for the Executive to comment on the matter at this stage, but I can say that Campbell Martin wrote to my colleague Tom McCabe about the PPP aspect of the matter and was offered a meeting. I understand that he did not take up that offer. Members may draw their own conclusions from that.

It might be helpful to make some final observations on the process. In PPP projects, councils have the assistance of guidance from the Scottish Executive on the process and of review by Partnerships UK at four separate points of the procedure, to ensure that things are properly done and represent value for money. Partnerships UK is charged by the Government with providing impartial, expert advice on PPP proposals. In the case that we are debating, Partnerships UK advised that the bid that North Ayrshire Council had accepted was affordable and would offer value for money. One basis for that decision was a check that was made against the public sector comparator.

The Parliament is not necessarily an appropriate forum for a debate in which allegations are raised that are apparently the subject of police scrutiny—or at least have been reported to the police—and which we cannot comment on or debate. The issues are not primarily for Parliament or the Executive, but the debate has nevertheless brought clarity to some aspects of the matter, although perhaps not in the way that Campbell Martin suggested or intended.

Meeting closed at 18:00.

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