

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Thursday 27 April 2006

Session 2

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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 27 April 2006

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

## Rural Development Programme

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Good morning. The first item of business is a debate on the Scottish rural development plan.

09:15

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** I welcome this opportunity to debate the public consultation on the Scottish rural development programme for 2007 to 2013, which will be important for rural Scotland in the next seven years. The new programme is a major opportunity to help to shape a rural Scotland that will deliver business competitiveness and public benefits for the environment and rural communities. Support will be available for land managers, businesses and communities throughout all rural areas. I know that many members have a clear interest in the content and implementation of the programme.

The consultation on the rural development programme follows public consultation on the strategic plan for the SRDP. That consultation closed at the end of March and we are considering the responses. The strategic plan will set out our policy priorities and objectives for the 2007 to 2013 programme which, in turn, will set out the measures and mechanisms for delivering those objectives. The formation of the two documents in the coming months will be governed by the new rural development regulation, which sets out the types of measures that can be funded by the new European agricultural fund for rural development.

As members are well aware, rural Scotland is renowned for the beauty of its landscapes, the diversity of its wildlife and its rich historic and cultural heritage. Just as important, however, is that it is a place where people live and work in land-based activities such as agriculture and forestry and in activities in the wider economy such as processing, tourism and other services. For many people, the dramatic landscape and remote setting present considerable challenges in running profitable businesses; for example, there are challenges in managing land in difficult physical and climatic conditions and in gaining access to markets and services.

However, rural Scotland also provides real opportunities for land managers and people in

other businesses—for example, to build products and services around the unique nature of rural Scotland's natural and cultural heritage and the contributions and skills of its people and communities.

Adoption of the right strategic approach is critical to the success of the next Scottish rural development plan. We must focus on the outcomes that we seek for rural Scotland so that we can be confident that the measures in the programme will complement one another and align with our policy objectives. Our work on the strategic plan to date has helped to promote that approach and is based around three themes: underpinning performance and quality in the agriculture, food processing and forestry sectors; enhancing rural landscapes and the natural heritage; and promoting a more diverse rural economy and thriving rural communities.

An integrated approach to land management and rural businesses is essential to our achieving the outcomes that we desire. To that end, our policies must emphasise the links between farming, forestry, food processing, tourism, other activities and the natural environment. I therefore want the new programme to be founded on measures that will deliver multiple outcomes on water quality, biodiversity, tourism, nutrient targeting, air quality, business competitiveness and so on.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** I agree with the objectives that the minister has outlined, but it strikes me—having read the document and while listening to the minister's speech—that the issues are tremendously complex, so the need for integration is absolute. Will the minister therefore tell us how he intends to deliver that integration without creating an ever-expanding bureaucracy that will affect people who are involved in agricultural business or other rural business development activity?

**Ross Finnie:** One of the starting points was the development of the land management contract, which seeks to prevent people who are engaged in land management and related activities from having to seek assistance through a range of different portals. The aim of developing land management contracts was to develop a single integrated approach. The test of that—the proof of that pudding—will be in whether we ensure that the bureaucracy that supports the individual entry points is also brought together. That is a key area in which we can contribute to the objective that Mr Swinney set out.

The objective of our approach is to meet the aims of the new rural development regulation, which encourages member states to integrate the delivery of objectives across the axes of business

competitiveness, land management and the natural environment, and the wider rural economy.

I will emphasise two more points. The first is that farmers, crofters, foresters, estate managers and others play a hugely important role in maintaining and enhancing Scotland's environment. High standards of land management safeguard the quality of the natural environment and underpin other activities throughout the rural economy, as is shown by the large number of visitors who come to enjoy the beauty of natural Scotland and to take advantage of its opportunities for recreation. In other words, proper management of our natural environment makes good economic sense.

Secondly, in order that they can carry out that role, land managers must feel confident that their environmental and social contribution is built on viable land-based enterprise that gives them a firm and sustainable economic foundation. They must have viable businesses that deliver high-quality products that can compete in markets at home and abroad. It is clear that business success and the quality of the environment are inextricably linked.

One of the key elements of the programme is the funding that will be available. I regret to say that, following the European Union financial perspective that was agreed in Brussels in December 2005, we are still awaiting confirmation of the funds that we will receive from the new European agricultural fund for rural development. Discussions continue between me, my department and officials, the United Kingdom Government—at ministerial and official levels—and the European Commission. A decision on how a financial package will be put together for the new rural development programme has to await the outcome of the EU financial perspective. In the meantime, we are examining options for funding the programme.

It is important that the financial package be implemented in a way that maintains stability at farm level because a viable industry is essential to delivering the wider benefits that we seek from stewardship of our rural areas. In particular, it will help us to support a credible and effective scheme of land management contracts.

The consultation paper proposes three main schemes for the rural development programme: the less favoured areas support scheme; land management contracts; and the LEADER initiative, which has now been brought into the agriculture perspective.

The less favoured areas support scheme has played a major part in our support for rural Scotland: some 85 per cent of Scotland is classified as a less favoured area. Payments in less favoured areas are vital to active

management of our upland and remote areas. They enable agricultural landscapes to be maintained and farming activities to support local economies and communities. Active management of the land is necessary for delivery of many of the outcomes that we seek from the three axes of the new programme, including the delivery of environmental benefits.

**Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD):** On the minister's point that active management has a number of benefits including environmental ones, is he aware that, on the morning after the consultation document was published, a spokesperson for RSPB Scotland expressed concern on Radio Orkney that the consequences could be fewer people being engaged in active management and farming, fewer livestock units and a consequential degradation of the environment? Will the minister respond to that?

Under the minister's proposals on the less favoured areas support scheme, greater weight will be given to fragile areas, such as islands, with regard to payments. For the record, does the minister accept that, when I am asked whether I agree

"with the proposals to give greater weight to 'very fragile areas' and to increase the minimum payment",

my answer will be yes?

**Ross Finnie:** I think that the member's first point is repeated in the RSPB bulletin which, no doubt, every member has read most carefully.

The issue in question is that, unfortunately, we are required to ensure that the new rural development programme complies with the principles of decoupling. That is extremely difficult in the context of Jim Wallace's point because the Executive's clear wish is to maintain livestock in our less favoured areas. We must resolve in the consultation how we will construct that measure without falling foul of the situation by creating the inference that we might be linking production to that scheme. We have made that clear to the RSPB and others; I regret the RSPB's comments, although it is perhaps just firing warning shots, because it is working constructively with Executive officials to try to solve the problem.

My commitment to less favoured areas is clear. It is not just about financial support, but about ensuring that productive and active management of that land continues through the less favoured areas scheme. Notwithstanding the date on which the consultation closes, I am happy to repeat in response to Jim Wallace that the continuation and extension into remote areas will be improved.

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**Ross Finnie:** No. I will make a little progress.

The one problem of the LFASS is that, regrettably, the rural development regulation delays implementation of any major changes to LFA support until 2010, so we propose that Scotland should have an interim scheme from 2007 to 2009 and that only limited changes will occur before 2010. As Jim Wallace said, I have made it clear that even under that limited alteration, support to areas that are classified as very fragile will have to be improved to take account of the extreme disadvantage that is faced in those areas.

**Alasdair Morgan:** The consultation document makes it clear that that improvement will be cash neutral, so increasing support for such areas will decrease support for less favoured areas that are not classified as very fragile. What objective criteria will be used to determine how much money is transferred, other than simply whether some places are or are not islands?

**Ross Finnie:** I cannot say; the consultation's purpose is to determine that. I am amazed that Alasdair Morgan did not anticipate that answer. To be fair, the issue is that objective criteria should be set. One principal reason why the LFASS as a whole has not been agreed throughout Europe is the failure to set truly objective criteria. Remoteness is one factor, but the meaning of objective criteria is another. I will speculate: could daylight hours be a criterion? If farmers have less opportunity to grow grass, does that mean that they have clear additional costs for feed in winter? Of course, I will welcome Alasdair Morgan's contribution on the objective criteria that he wants to be included in the measures.

**Mr Swinney:** Will the minister give way?

**Ross Finnie:** I will make a little more progress.

The introduction of land management contracts in 2005 placed Scotland at the forefront of integrated approaches to delivery in Europe and I am delighted by the enthusiasm with which the scheme has been embraced. In its first year of operation, 10,000 farmers entered tier 2 of the scheme. Land management contracts provide the opportunity to deliver a truly integrated approach to land management and to wider rural development in which business success accompanies sustainable environmental management.

Our major proposal for the new programme is to introduce the third and final tier of land management contracts. That tier will deliver a higher level of benefits that are better integrated across all land management activities and which are more closely tailored to local needs. I hope that the scheme will set new standards in innovation, and that it will assist people who work

on the ground to maintain viable businesses and deliver the wider benefits that society expects from the countryside.

Another new different and exciting feature of the next rural development programme will be the embracing and inclusion of the LEADER initiative, which has been a valuable means of achieving innovation in rural development by supporting people's capacity locally to develop and manage projects that generate benefits for their communities. I welcome the inclusion of LEADER in the next programme and believe that its flexibility will play a key role in engaging communities to participate in actions that will benefit rural Scotland.

To give members a flavour of what the new programme can deliver, I will say a few words about the measures that the programme may fund. We have compiled a list, based on the work of the stakeholders in our technical working groups, of well over 100 measures that could be supported under the programme. The list contains measures on a wide range of subjects including product quality, forestry, climate change, water quality, renewable energy and biofuels, animal welfare, wetland management, flood prevention, the landscape, biodiversity, public access, tourism facilities and skills development. The breadth of measures demonstrates the potential for innovation in the new programme.

The combination of measures reflects not only the importance of environmental and social outcomes to the public and society, but the contribution to supporting product quality, business profitability and the capacity of communities to enhance their quality of life. All those elements are important at this time, when rural industries and communities are going through significant change.

Given our limited financial resources, we will have to make choices about priorities and the final number of measures that can be supported. I expect the responses to the consultation to help us to select the measures that can deliver the best outcomes for rural Scotland.

The consultation document makes it clear that another key feature of the programme is the importance that is placed on addressing regional and local priorities, although we will of course continue to ensure that we meet our national and international objectives and obligations. A regional perspective will be essential in enabling us to implement a programme that recognises the differing circumstances and opportunities that communities throughout rural Scotland face.

**Ms Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Does the minister recognise that local action group areas under LEADER are somewhat

large for a small country such as ours? The minimum population for an area is 10,000 and the maximum is 100,000. Is not that prescriptive? Are those thresholds based on EU figures for larger countries such as Germany, Denmark and England?

**Ross Finnie:** I am happy to consider that, if changes can be accommodated within the regulation. I hope that Maureen Watt accepts that it is generally welcome that LEADER will be brought under the ambit of the rural development programme. If the prescriptive numbers to which she referred are a barrier to proper progress, we will be happy to consider them as part of the consultation.

The rural development programme is of course part of a wider array of funding streams and programmes that can benefit rural areas. It is essential that we achieve consistency and complementarity between programmes so that we can be sure that resources are being spent wisely and so that we can maximise benefits. I am keen to ensure that the next programme properly complements funds such as European Union structural funds.

We propose to integrate some national support schemes with the programme, in order to ensure complementarity of approach and funding. We have proposed a regionalised approach. Bringing together schemes will also provide an opportunity to involve local and regional interests. I hope that simplification of our approach will address some of the issues that Mr Swinney raised.

As is shown by the wide range of measures that I listed, the programme will contribute to the objectives in different sectors of the rural economy as set out in the strategies for agriculture, forestry and tourism, for example. We must remember that the rural development programme is part of a much bigger rural picture.

I look forward to development of a 2007 to 2013 Scottish rural development programme that recognises all stakeholders' needs and delivers a truly integrated approach in which business success supports sustainable environmental management and thriving rural communities. Consultation of the many stakeholders will be vital in helping us to develop that programme. In the coming weeks, we will hold a series of public meetings throughout rural Scotland so that we can hear the widest range of views and give explanations that will achieve the widest understanding of the programme's implications. That will ensure that we have a truly representative consultative process. Of course, I also look forward to hearing all members' views on the proposals.

09:34

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):**

The Scottish National Party welcomes the measures for the rural economy and environmental development that can support existing families, and hopes that they can lead to more people choosing to live and work in our rural areas. We all know that there are far starker challenges for people who attempt to make their living in rural areas than there are for many of the people who pursue career opportunities in our cities. This is an age of flight from the countryside to the cities, especially by young people, so it is vital that we reverse the population drain from the countryside. Determination of whether the Scottish rural development programme encourages such a reversal should be one benchmark for the people who judge the suitability of the measures that the Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department proposes.

For my starting point, I take the truism that James Hunter uttered in the first evidence-taking session on the Crofting Reform etc Bill. He remarked that few crofters make a full-time living from agriculture and said that it follows that the viability of crofting communities at any point depends more on the health of the wider rural economy of which crofters are part than purely and simply on agriculture. A version of that statement could be applied to most parts of Scotland; few farmers nowadays rely solely on agricultural income. Many rely on the off-farm incomes of their spouses or partners, so the programme that we are discussing will be vital in enhancing the incomes of rural land holders. That has been widely agreed.

The SNP broadly agrees with the Government that several elements have to be in place in pursuing a development strategy. Of course, quality food production and forestry output must be underpinned. We must deliver enhanced rural landscapes and natural heritage for the public good, and we must diversify economic activities in the rural economy, which will underpin thriving rural communities. How such things are done will vary and will depend on soil quality, location, population sparsity, remoteness and climate of the areas concerned. There is a massive task for people sitting in the department in thinking themselves into the positions of folk who live in such diverse circumstances.

Europe has recognised that these are strategic aims. How we organise our schemes to meet conditions in Scotland will be key to the success of the structure from 2007 to 2013. Will we be allowed to secure funding from Europe that is untouched by the Blair-Brown clawback proposals? As the minister said, we are unsure about the reduction in the amount that will be



available for the programmes. We would like an assurance from the minister that there will be no stinting on spending on the programmes in the period. Having as much money as possible and not diverting it to other purposes are vital for the future of Scotland's rural areas. I seek ministerial discipline for the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department to create clarity of process and baseline data from which to work, and I seek transparent targets so that an outcome can be achieved in each element of the plan that we can debate in future reviews of progress.

The briefing from the Soil Association states that far greater importance should be accorded to monitoring progress towards desired outcomes and that that monitoring should begin with a comprehensive analysis of baseline data. I wonder whether members are presented with material that allows us to see what progress has been made and where we stand when we start to apply new forms of regulation to cover the next period. Such material will have to be considered.

Aims in the three axes that are outlined in the consultation—which are improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, improving the environment and the countryside and improving the quality of life in rural areas—could all be delivered by organic agriculture, for example. There are sometimes uncertainties about the support mechanisms for organic agriculture—I see Tory members starting to fidget—but many people throughout the country believe, as the Soil Association does, that organic agriculture is vital. Further development of organic food and farming should be a key identified priority in the final document. I hope that it will be.

I am concerned as a result of meetings that I hold in rural communities that producers find that the overlapping and changing conditions of all the interlocking schemes create huge administrative burdens for farmers, crofters or foresters who are not accountants or professional form fillers, although many would qualify for degrees in agricultural administration by accredited prior learning. I suppose that the career that is most on the advance in rural areas is that of the consultant who helps people to fill in their forms—some benefits result from having a complex system. If forms are to stack up in the vaults of Pentland House, surely it is necessary to think about how greater integration can be achieved. The one-stop shop approach in various parts of the programme is to be welcomed, but inventing new paper streams will not make things simpler.

I turn to the less favoured areas support scheme. I am concerned that the sustainability of many communities is on the edge. If the moneys that are made available by the programme are to be based on historical payments in 2006, that can

disadvantage some people. On Monday, I heard evidence from a young crofter in Lewis who is trying to get a quota from the national reserve for this year—there are people who are mad enough to try to make a start in agriculture at the moment, but if they do not start at the right time, much of the base of the spending from the programmes may not be available to them. Such things are happening although sheep numbers have fallen by around 10 per cent in the past year. If people want to come into agriculture, there should be a flexible mechanism that enables them to do so. I have not seen such a mechanism described in the documents that have been presented.

Cattle numbers are also falling, and need to be supported through the SRDP proposals. About a third of the annual support of £61 million that is provided by the LFASS represents a significant environmental measure. The discussion about how the RSPB lobbied needs to be seen in the light of practical experience. In the fragile north and west of the country, removing top-up payments for keeping cattle is likely to accelerate decline. The minister has acknowledged that it is difficult to reach a definition because we must move away from headage, but it is essential that a definition be made. It was interesting to hear primary pupils at Rosehall last Friday talking about their environmental trip to Islay, where they were told about the survival of the rare chough, which relies on a beetle that lives in cattle dung. If the number of cattle is reduced, the potential for that bird to survive will be minimised.

**Ross Finnie:** Rob Gibson makes valid points about the less favoured areas support scheme, but does he accept that electing to implement the beef national envelope has been significant in keeping suckler cow herds on the hills and has been important for the remote areas to which he has referred?

**Rob Gibson:** The minister may be chuffed by the evidence that he has just led, but we must consider the programme in total. One element is not enough to ensure that the whole works.

The SNP welcomes the inclusion of LEADER in the plans, but we have concerns about the size of local action groups, as we have stated. They need to be constructed to meet area needs in a variety of sizes. I hope that they will meet the needs of areas that are as small as Harris or Lewis, for example, rather than the needs of 10,000 to 100,000 people, as has been mentioned. Colleagues will expand on that matter.

We are glad that the review of the land management contract tier 2 menu is under way. The one-stop-shop test is vital to make that work. However, can we be reassured about another element? The consultation document jocularly refers to

“SEERAD and its family of agencies”

being deployed to help all aspects of countryside life. Some might say that that is the family from hell. Far too many real families have been forced to leave the land in search of work. The acid test for the programme will be whether that trend can be reversed. SEERAD and its quasi-autonomous children have yet to prove themselves to be real supporters of the countryside.

It is good to see that standard payments will be laid out for standard capital items at an early stage. I hope that all the supporting material will be in place in good time for land managers to formulate their claims. Far too often in schemes such as this we find that the closing date for applications precedes the time when the detail of the payments is laid out for people, which causes considerable problems.

As a representative of the Highlands and Islands, I am acutely aware of the need for community rights to make decisions as well as for plans to develop the best way forward. The LEADER programme, of course, helps people to think in terms of communities, but I hope that the Government will embrace the idea that it must try to help people do that. Although there is great commitment to community planning, there is not much commitment to enable people to take more decisions at the most local level.

In addition, there has been far too much evidence in recent consultations of ministers' ignoring much of the evidence that consultees produce. Two consultations that affected my area were on the bull-hire scheme and the crofting reform process. If people do not answer the questions that ministers ask, what they say is ignored, but some of the wisest remarks about the future are in comments that are triggered by the questions that ministers ask, but which do not necessarily answer ministers' questions. The result of the consultation will depend on how closed ministers' approach to the consultation document will be, and how open they will be to suggestions.

If the 2007 to 2013 Scottish rural development programme is to be effective and cutting edge, deskbound civil servants must listen to the practitioners and think carefully about real life in the countryside. The Environment and Rural Development Committee took evidence in Stornoway last Monday on the Crofting Reform etc Bill and afterwards I was presented, by a local consultant, with a recently written paper on lamb marketing for sustainable futures in the outer Hebrides. The stark truth is that all the current subsidies under the common agricultural policy contributed to a gross margin for flocks in Lewis of just 53p per breeding ewe in 2004. Fixed costs would need to be allocated before the true profit—

or, in this case, loss—could be calculated. The fragility of our countryside is illustrated for people who come from leafier areas by that perhaps extreme example.

The proof of the success of the rural development programme will be in whether it encourages producers and land managers in all the varied Scottish circumstances to combat the deeply unprofitable agricultural times in which we live with a new set of supports that are vital to keeping rural populations buoyant and, as I said at the start, which dare to increase the number who earn their living from our land.

09:47

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con):** I am grateful that I am following Rob Gibson, but I am not so grateful to him for pinching the final line of my speech about the happy SEERAD family all coming together in an efficient grant management process—I hope I live to see the day.

I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, if it still exists this morning.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Subject to determination.

**Alex Fergusson:** Indeed, subject to determination. In the register, members will see that I am a sleeping partner in a farming partnership in Ayrshire.

The Executive's consultation is indeed important. I do not disagree with NFU Scotland's view that it is perhaps one of the most important consultations in many years. I hope that the many and varied stakeholders involved have not grown so tired of Executive consultation exercises, which have been equally many and varied, that they do not treat this one with the seriousness that it deserves. All stakeholders need to make their views known and I will encourage them to do so at every opportunity.

The consultation document is large and many individuals and organisations, including me, are just beginning to get their heads round it. I want to focus my speech on three or four areas that I believe to be of particular concern—most of which have already been mentioned, so I cannot be far off the mark—on which eventual decisions could have serious implications for rural development.

The first concern revolves around axis 2 funding under the rural development regulation, which states that 25 per cent of the European agricultural fund for rural development funding should go towards

“Improving the environment and countryside through land management”.

That is a perfectly laudable and agreeable aim, but my concern is that it perhaps allows us to take our eye off the importance of retaining profitability within the agricultural sector. I think that the minister acknowledged some of that importance in his opening speech.

As I see it, the problem is that funding that is delivered for environmental schemes through axis 2 tends simply to reimburse all or most of the money spent by the land manager on an environmentally suitable scheme; it does little or nothing for the profitability of the business concerned. The very fact that we have a rural environment in Scotland that so many people are so keen to protect and preserve is due to the fact that with a profitable agricultural sector come the environmental benefits that we all seek, even if those benefits occasionally need to be prompted and incentivised from the centre. It is because we have fostered and encouraged a reasonably profitable agricultural sector over the years that we now have a countryside that is so well worth preserving. If we lose the link between support and profitability, I believe that we will lose long-term sustainable environmental benefit.

Since the introduction of the single farm payment and the consequent breaking of another link between subsidy and production, the only remaining incentive to maintain stock numbers on hill and marginal farms has been the LFASS, which still pays out on the headage number of sheep and cattle and which falls within axis 2 of the rural development regulation. The RSPB, which is not a body with which I often agree 100 per cent, but which I commend for its speed in pointing out the danger in this instance, acknowledges that incentive, among the many benefits of the scheme, and I whole-heartedly agree with its view that the proposals in the current consultation for the LFASS would be a backward step for the environment. One of the acknowledged impacts of the single farm payment was that suckled calf production would most likely move down the hill, which has been the case to a degree. The LFASS is the only incentive to keep them on the hills, with the recognised environmental benefit that that brings—although I hear what the minister says about the beef envelope—yet there is no substitute for the LFASS incentive in the proposals.

The Executive's desire in effect to freeze LFASS payments on an historical basis will not just keep things as they are until 2010, the year in which the European Commission requires a full review of less favoured areas; some £20 million per annum that is currently payable to keep cattle in those areas will still be paid out without any requirement for the recipient to justify or earn that support. As I understand it, there is no need to bring in the proposed change until 2010. The less favoured

areas scheme does what it says on the tin; it supports less favoured areas. It works well, so why do we not just leave it alone until it has to be changed? The proposals in the consultation document would almost bring in change for change's sake and I believe that they should be resisted.

One change to the LFASS that I would welcome would be the inclusion of dairy producers. Such a change is long overdue, would take only £3 million to £4 million out of a total of some £135 million and would bring much-needed relief to that beleaguered sector.

As Jim Wallace pointed out, there is a proposal to redistribute the available LFASS funding by giving a heavier weighting to very fragile areas at the expense of standard areas. I agree with Alasdair Morgan that that would be completely unacceptable and believe that it falls into the trap of losing the link between support and economic activity. Any further support for the very fragile areas, which might well be justified, should not come at the expense of funding for fragile and standard areas.

Modulation is always a contentious issue. I am somewhat alarmed at a sentence in the minister's foreword in the consultation document, where he acknowledges that the budget will not be enough to achieve all the outputs that stakeholders seek. He goes on to say that that could be overcome by additional voluntary modulation from the single farm payment. In his language, additional voluntary modulation really means compulsory reduction in the single farm payment. I seek an absolute assurance from the minister that no such increase in modulation will be contemplated without an absolute guarantee of matched funding from the Treasury. It seems to me that the Executive tends to assess how much funding it has available through modulation before deciding how to spend it. Perhaps the consultation might improve the delivery mechanism by agreeing the objectives first, which would then determine the amount of modulated funding required.

I will say a brief word on forestry, although its current state, in the private sector at least, demands more than a brief word, frankly. The decision to bring forward the closure of the Scottish forestry grant scheme and the subsequent torrent of applications, which should surely not have come as a surprise given that there has been no word of a successor, have left the private sector in nothing less than a chaotic shambles—and a very angry shambles at that.

The handling of the scheme has been an unmitigated disaster. Many applicants now have unsubmitted, partially prepared schemes—prepared at considerable cost to themselves—and there has been no assurance that submitted

schemes will be accepted. If this were a private business, heads would roll; but no doubt the only losers in this instance will be the highly efficient private sector, which is bearing the full brunt of public sector dithering. I trust that the outcome of the consultation will be a better system but, in the meantime, chaos reigns. The Executive should address that.

Many challenges are made in the consultation paper and many issues are raised. Some are eminently sensible; others less so. However, the overriding message to all who care about rural Scotland is that this is people's chance to shape the future. I trust that they will do so in their thousands.

09:55

**Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab):** In this short speech I want to raise points on different aspects of rural development from the debates that we have had over the past two or three years and test whether they appear in the rural development programme that Ross Finnie has put out for consultation.

Everybody is struggling with an overarching issue that has come through in the speeches this morning: how do rural communities deal with external forces that impact on the rural economy? I am thinking in particular of centralising forces in the public sector as we try to get better value for money for services, and I am wondering what that means for local communities. Private sector market forces are also centralising and changing. How will rural communities deal with those challenges? Part of the solution will have to be in the rural development programme.

Ross Finnie's foreword is good at saying that we have to join the dots between different issues. We are not dealing with just one issue, and joined-up thinking will be required as we face the different challenges. I must admit that I had expected Ross to talk a little more about climate change. That might be because I have spent the past couple of days in the Western Isles, thinking through the big challenges that communities there will face over the next few years. The updated climate change programme, "Changing Our Ways", has just been released and I had expected climate change to be a thread running through this morning's speech.

CAP reform is another issue that worries farming communities, which wonder how they will respond to external changes that are outwith their control. Our starting point has to be this question: how do we equip our rural communities with financial resources and people skills that will allow them to deal with challenges and turn them not into problems but into opportunities?

Real issues arise to do with the management of change and with leadership, and communities

have to be involved in shaping the process. The consultation is important and I hope that we do not witness the consultation fatigue that Alex Fergusson mentioned. I hope that communities seize this opportunity to shape their future. The consultation has to come alive. The three themes in the document—underpinning performance in the agriculture, food and forestry industries; promoting and protecting our landscapes and heritage; and promoting a much more diverse rural economy with thriving communities—represent the overarching challenges. Communities should be helped so that they are equipped to face them.

Ross Finnie talked a lot about the different schemes that will help rural communities, and my colleague Alasdair Morrison will focus on the LFASS. Some progress has been made on land management contracts. The Environment and Rural Development Committee was very critical of the minister early in the process. However, when we read through the explanation of the changes that have been made—in particular, to the second tier of land management contracts—it seemed worth giving credit to the minister for moving in the direction that the committee hoped he would move in. Issues such as environmental quality and management, animal health and welfare and biodiversity must be part of the integrated mix of challenges. There has to be money for such schemes as well.

Alex Fergusson wondered whether environmental schemes were simply an extra that comes as part of the process. An issue perhaps arises to do with the way in which we value our rural environment and regard it as part of Scotland's economic wealth. We must ask how we can protect the environment for the future but also how we can obtain economic value from it. There is a debate to be had.

Ramblers have worried about what they regard as an overemphasis on business development. Unless protecting and enhancing our environment is an overarching objective, and unless we can link that to business and economic development, we will miss a trick and make life harder for our rural communities. The ramblers' comment was a single line in a document, but I suspect that there will now be a debate on what it really means.

We have to ensure that all the different stakeholders are party to the process and are not put in the position of only being able to send us a brief one-page document the day before we have a debate. As the consultation continues, a series of issues will arise.

Every time we have a debate in the Environment and Rural Development Committee, we come back to the issue of how we can add value, at local and regional level, to products that are created in rural communities. I very much

welcome Ross Finnie's comments on the LEADER programme and on the need to have local and regional strategies. If value is not added at local level, communities are selling their products only for the benefits to be added somewhere else. We must change that.

In that context, I was disappointed that the minister did not raise the issue of co-operatives. The Environment and Rural Development Committee has considered how, in other countries, benefits have been captured for local communities because they have a much more co-operative framework. When we consider the challenges of CAP reform and the different financial structures, we must ensure that we secure benefits locally and do not simply export low-value food products. The maximum possible value must be added in the communities where the food products are made.

We have talked before about abattoirs and about local finishing. We have to support agricultural communities to develop their work in the food chain—and that is one of the issues that the Environment and Rural Development Committee will include in its report on the food chain, which we are still discussing. There are issues in that regard that I would like to have been stressed more this morning.

Public sector procurement is of direct relevance to farming communities. We have a huge public purse in Scotland, and I do not go along with those who criticise the amount of money that we spend on public services, because those services are of huge benefit to communities. However, I would like more value to be wrung out of the expenditure, and I would like there to be better food sourcing by local authorities and by health boards. That would lead to practical links between communities in urban and rural areas, which would be good for our farming communities. There are many such issues that must be added to the debate.

**Ross Finnie:** I do not disagree with any of the last four or five points that the member has made; they are central to the development of rural communities. However, does the member accept that issues such as co-operation and partnership working are referred to in the recently revised agricultural strategy? The present consultation document is long enough as it is, and we cannot repeat everything. It is a little unfair to imply that such issues are not in our thinking. They are specifically referred to in the agricultural strategy.

**Sarah Boyack:** But I was expecting those issues to come up today. I expected them to feed into the debate, because they are crucial.

At the start of my speech, I talked about climate change. The Executive's documents, "Changing Our Ways: Scotland's Climate Change

Programme" and "Choosing our Future: Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy", are excellent, but I now expect to feel them, and to see them feed through into all speeches that ministers make. It is a challenge not only for ministers but for all of us. I say to Ross Finnie that I am not being excessively critical, but I do expect such issues to be part of the story of how we support our rural communities.

On climate change, the way in which we power and heat our rural communities will be crucial over the next few years. Those communities are overdependent on oil—a resource that will not be available forever and that is a source of carbon emissions that we are all trying to wean ourselves off. Renewables offer a massive opportunity.

In passing, Ross Finnie mentioned the 100 measures that the LEADER programme will support. This is an area in which we need more joined-up thinking. When we consider renewables, we should not simply be considering a new industry coming into the system; we should be considering how to support our agricultural and rural communities to have locally based industries.

The Environment and Rural Development Committee's recent report on biomass identified that 2,000 new jobs could be created in our rural communities. That represents a huge opportunity for rural communities to secure economic benefit in their areas, which would mean that they would not have to import highly expensive fuel and to export their goods at low value. We want to secure value in local communities by helping farmers to think about how biofuels can add value to their land and by encouraging the forestry industry to assess how to get the maximum value out of Scotland's forests. We have a huge resource and we should consider how our use of it fits into the rural development programme. Renewables must be part of that programme because they represent a massive opportunity, which we cannot afford to miss.

Yesterday I was at an energy conference in Tarbert on Harris, to which it was expected that about 60 people would turn up, but more than 100 came. New industries such as renewables are a live issue. At the conference, I met people whom I had met on Monday in Stornoway, where the Environment and Rural Development Committee took evidence on the Crofting Reform etc Bill. By Wednesday, they were all wearing different hats—whereas on Monday they had been representing crofting organisations, two days later they were representing bodies such as the North Harris Trust and community buyout organisations.

It is important to bring together the key local players. It is excellent that some of the LEADER work is being moved across from the enterprise side to the rural development side, but we must

ensure that we do not lose the emphasis on local skills and leadership. I hope that the rural development plan will do that. A key issue that emerged from the Environment and Rural Development Committee's inquiry into rural development was that rural communities' skills and confidence in their businesses are crucial to the success or failure of those communities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** You should finish now.

**Sarah Boyack:** The provision of grants and financial support to rural communities is vital, but how the people who live in those communities can access that support and make the most of it must be part of the picture.

I welcome the rural development plan, which is a big step in the right direction. I have criticised aspects of it only because I want certain issues to be added to the picture. Most of the recommendations that the Environment and Rural Development Committee makes pop up in future ministerial decisions. If I sounded critical, that was because I want more to be done in the future, not because I do not acknowledge what Ross Finnie has done in the past.

10:07

**Ms Maureen Watt (North East Scotland) (SNP):** As Rob Gibson said, we broadly welcome the consultation document, "Rural Development Programme for Scotland 2007-2013", and the chance to debate the future of the land of Scotland and the part that it plays in our overall economic development. As with any plan, the devil will be in the detail and in the funding that is available.

Much is said about the rural economy and the need to diversify so that the population in the countryside can be maintained and enhanced, but we must never lose sight of the primary aim of the land, which is to provide food for our people. In January of last year, I was horrified to hear a minister from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs say at a conference in Oxford that he no longer thought that it was important that food came from our own resources. We live in a time of global insecurity, which is mostly caused by Bush and Blair and by the UK Government's pursuit of a disastrous foreign policy and failure in its duty to protect and defend the security of our citizens. Failure to recognise the importance in a hungry world of home-grown food and to protect food sources leaves us, as an island, highly vulnerable.

Here in Scotland, where agriculture is a devolved issue, we have an opportunity to take a different tack from our southern neighbours. Food production is immensely important to the Scottish economy. The beef cattle industry, which

produces 167,000 tonnes of beef, is worth £450 million. Scotland has almost 30 per cent of the UK herd of breeding cattle and 4 per cent of the EU herd. The sheep flock is worth £98 million and Scotland has more than 20 per cent of the UK breeding flock. The pig industry is worth another £150 million; 63 per cent of the country's pigs come from my area in the north-east. Dairy is worth £230 million, poultry and eggs are worth £120 million, cereals—mainly wheat and barley—are worth £260 million and we should not forget the seed potato industry and our exports of fruit and oil-seed rape, for example.

In spite of that, we witness daily pressure on agricultural land, not just from housebuilding, as our towns and cities expand, but from the use of prime agricultural land to plant trees, which is ridiculous. Sustainable forestry must be on moorland rather than on prime agricultural land.

We have yet to experience the full effects of the single farm payment scheme, but I am not optimistic that it will encourage food production. The minister mentioned the beauty of rural Scotland, but that is a result of good land management. Nothing can be more distressing to a farmer's daughter than to see good productive land being set aside. That is a travesty in a world in which there is still widespread famine.

As people become more aware of the need for fair trade at home and in developing countries and of the need to reduce food miles, we must encourage food production rather than stifle it. We must welcome local farmers markets, which offer excellent benefits to farmers and the public, and recognise the advantages of shopping at small local butchers, bakers and delicatessens, which stock local produce, often at cheaper prices than the supermarkets.

It is regrettable that the minister glossed over how the achievement of the rural development plan's aims will be financed. In my view, he seems to be relying far too heavily on EU funding. In that context, I want to discuss the LEADER programme. In an excellent speech, Sarah Boyack spoke about equipping people with the skills to meet future challenges. LEADER has been very good at developing bottom-up community initiatives. Community LEADER agents have given communities confidence to seek funding from a variety of sources to supplement LEADER start-up money. In upper Banffshire and upper Speyside, for example, LEADER initiatives have enabled communities to start a children's drop-in centre, to refurbish a community hall, to open a visitor resource centre and to develop, with the Crown Estate, a footpath network, which stimulates tourism. Information on walking routes is the information most commonly requested by tourists in that area. In the expanding EU, we must ensure

that LEADER money is still available to our upland areas.

The minister said a great deal about involving stakeholders, but local authorities are often forgotten about. There is no point in the Scottish Parliament encouraging people to live and work in rural areas if, at the same time, our local authorities are closing rural schools and—as is happening in Liberal Democrat-controlled Aberdeenshire—cutting rather than facilitating access to school transport. The joined-up government that is so often spoken about is far from being achieved.

10:13

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** Any interests that I may have are registered in the register of members' interests.

A common theme that has emerged in this morning's debate is that we want to have a thriving, sustainable countryside in which sustainable development is encouraged. Scotland's countryside should be an attractive place in which to live and work, but its attractiveness relies heavily on a thriving rural economy and a healthy farming sector. Sadly, that is not what we have today. The figures for total income from farming for 2005 were worse than expected—they showed a fall of around 10.9 per cent from an already low base. The situation is particularly difficult for below-average farms. The incomes of farms in the bottom 25 per cent have fallen by 134 per cent in just one year. The dairy sector is struggling, too. Last year, six out of 10 dairy farmers failed to cover their costs. Over the past five years, some 700 family farms have gone out of production.

We now face the possibility of an outbreak of avian flu. It is a great relief that the death of only one whooper swan has been attributed to the H5N1 virus. We hope that that continues to be the case and that the final restriction zone can be lifted on 1 May, as planned.

The discovery of the bird exemplifies the delicate and unpredictable nature of the rural sector and the need for the Executive to be fully prepared to deal with the virus. It is crucial that ministers get information to the public to ensure that we are following the correct precautions and to minimise disruption at a vital time of year for our tourism industry, while keeping the public health of the nation paramount. In addition, if there is a risk of a pandemic, anti-viral agents should be available to everyone who needs them and not just to a favoured few.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Executive's consultation on its rural development programme for Scotland from 2007 to 2013. We

agree with NFU Scotland, which has said that the consultation is one of the most important for many years. We urge farmers to respond to the document that lays the foundations for their industry for the next seven years and we commend NFUS for holding public meetings in co-operation with the Executive, to spread the news of the consultation throughout the countryside.

I agree with the concerns that members expressed about the Executive's proposals for major changes to three rural support schemes, which form the bedrock of the rural industry: the less favoured areas support scheme; land management contracts; and LEADER. It is important that changes to the LFASS do not result in funds being taken away from farmers to be given to people in fragile areas. Support for less favoured areas should be found via another scheme, because the removal of funds from farmers would endanger the viability of some farms and could cause divisions in the sector, which I think we all want to avoid.

**Rob Gibson:** Does the member agree that if the LFASS is to work, the least favoured areas need more support than they have received recently? Those areas can produce quality produce, but do so in more difficult circumstances.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** I understand that such areas already receive extra payments. The minister will have noted the member's point.

I hope that the Executive will carefully consider the concern expressed by RSPB Scotland that substitute measures should be introduced to replace the headage-based top-up payments for cattle, which are no longer allowed under the new rural development regulation. Jim Wallace raised the matter and we were reassured by the minister's comments, but RSPB Scotland says that incentives to keep cattle numbers up are essential, because a number of Scotland's priority species, including red-billed chough, corncrake, corn bunting, lapwing, snipe and redshank have benefited from and depend on the continuation of cattle farming to provide the habitats that they need. The conservation of wildlife habitats is important to ensure that species are sustainable and not constantly under threat of extinction. I hope that the minister will find a meeting of minds with RSPB Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage in that regard.

We agree with the comments by members that changes to land management contracts and LEADER must result in reduced bureaucracy and the simplification of the schemes. We are keen that any new advisory network that is created should be additional to the good work of the Scottish agricultural colleges and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.

The consultation document refers to the £19 billion EU budget cut that was inflicted in December on rural development spending, which is expected to lead to a 20 per cent cut in funding for Scotland. I ask the minister quickly to provide precise figures to stakeholders, because it is unsettling for them not to know their fate.

The consultation on the rural development plan is welcome, but we should be under no illusions. The Scottish rural farming sector faces challenging new initiatives. We hope that the Executive will keep that in mind in pursuing its objective of supporting thriving rural communities.

10:19

**Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):** I ask members to note my declaration in the register of members' interests, which bears no resemblance to that of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton but states my membership of the Scottish Crofting Foundation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton was right to say that a debate about issues that affect rural Scotland must make reference to the grave situation that faces rural communities not just in Scotland but throughout the world. For many people, avian flu is genuinely a matter of life and death. Although the issue is not a primary concern in England, we can empathise with friends in Norfolk who are dealing with the consequences of finding a suspected strain of avian flu. I want to put on record my appreciation of how recent events in Fife were dealt with by ministers and their officials, who calmly dealt with the rogue swan in an appropriate manner, which was reassuring. I am open to correction on this, but I suspect that that approach was adopted in the light of the handling of the difficult and fraught incident in 2001. We can contrast the professionalism of ministers and officials with the hysteria of the nationalists, who demanded, for example, that the First Minister return from New York, where he and others were busy doing the serious job of promoting the whole of Scotland. The nationalists' response represented infantile, silly and puerile politics. What the First Minister was meant to do on his return was not entirely clear. Was he supposed to don a scientist's white coat and sit in a laboratory to await the outcome of a blood test on a single whooper swan? The nationalists adopted a ludicrous position.

**Rob Gibson:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Morrison:** I suspect that the lunacy will be compounded by Mr Gibson's intervention.

**Rob Gibson:** Perhaps we need facts from the Government. Can the member tell us whether the budget for veterinary services has been increased so that services can cope with an outbreak or whether that budget has been reduced?

**Mr Morrison:** I am sure that Ms Brankin will ably deal with the member's point about the detail of the budget in her closing speech. I merely comment on the infantile position adopted by the nationalists' deputy leader in demanding the return of the First Minister to Scotland to deal with an incident that was being properly dealt with by the people who are paid to do so—the scientists, the vets and the ministers in charge of the Environment and Rural Affairs Department. If Mr McConnell had listened to Rob Gibson and his deputy leader and returned to Scotland, anyone who showed an interest in tartan week in the United States would have seen images of a First Minister flying home to deal with an incident that I am sure would have been reported as though it were on the scale of the foot-and-mouth crisis, which would have been regrettable. I am sure that those of us who were concerned about the incident were hugely reassured during the Easter recess when—I am open to correction on this, too—Ross Finnie was reported as saying that he was in “constant telephonic linkage” with the First Minister.

**Ross Finnie:** And very beneficial it was, too.

**Mr Morrison:** The aims of the rural development plan highlight the need to ensure the viability of high nature value farming, in other words non-intensive agricultural activity, in line with international commitments on biodiversity. As a result of CAP reform, agricultural activity in marginal areas, which are often high nature value areas, faces particular challenges. If we are not vigilant, such activity could decline. Rob Gibson mentioned the less favoured areas support scheme. It has been decided at European level to address the demanding need of such areas and any new arrangements must reflect the new circumstances of upland, peripheral and island areas. Grave concerns have been expressed by the Scottish Crofting Foundation and others in that regard. Ministers are well aware of those concerns and will remain engaged with the need to ensure that the LFASS is finessed to realise what we all want for people in the parts of Scotland where crofting takes place, such as the Western Isles.

My colleague Sarah Boyack referred to the successful renewable energy conference that was held this week in Harris. She ably contributed to the conference, which was attended by delegates from Shetland, Orkney, the mainland Highlands and the islands of Argyll. The conference was significant in that it was the first major get-together for people involved in micro-renewable energy projects. It was striking to everyone who attended that the people who were involved in recent land buyouts are at the forefront of the renewable energy revolution. Delegates from estates that are currently subject to buyouts are joining the queue and also want to play an important role.



Land buyouts have helped to release entrepreneurial energy in many communities. We fondly recall contributions from our friends on the Tory benches during debates on the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, who prophesised that the opposite would happen. Bill Aitken's contributions were particularly striking during that era in Scottish political history. The people who were involved in that conference and many other people from throughout the crofting counties now look to the Crofting Reform etc Bill to augment and complement the huge success of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. I am certain that, when that bill completes its legislative journey, it will do just that.

Rob Gibson, rather characteristically and depressingly, said:

"This is an age of flight from the countryside".

I do not agree with Mr Gibson's sweeping analysis. He quoted Professor Jim Hunter—there is no better authority on the historical context of issues in the Highlands and Islands. Jim Hunter has rightly trumpeted the upturn in the economic fortunes of the Highlands and Islands in recent years. Rather than being a region that people are leaving in droves, as it is portrayed by the Scottish nationalists, it is enjoying a renaissance in many respects. Had the population of Scotland followed the population profile of the Highlands and Islands, we would have 6 million people living in Scotland today. Last year, for the first time in 30 years, the population in my constituency increased. When the new figures are published, which I believe will be later this week, I hope that we will see a continuation of that encouraging trend.

The retention of the population in rural Scotland in areas such as the Western Isles needs a multifaceted strategy that involves supporting crofting, communities that are involved in land buyouts and aquaculture. The introduction of the minimum import price for salmon was a triumph of political lobbying. That protectionist measure was secured and advanced by the Scottish ministers and United Kingdom Government ministers to protect us from the ravages of cheap imports of salmon from Norway and other parts of the world.

The retention of the population also involves supporting our fishermen. We can but fondly recall the contribution from the nationalists on the important issue of protecting scallop fishermen. The nationalists portray themselves as the friends of the fishermen but, two and a half years ago, rather than put the interests of Western Isles fishermen at the forefront of their actions, deliberations, thoughts and words, they were busy taking instruction from Mr Salmond on the east coast of Scotland. When we hear hand-wringing tales of woe from Mr Gibson and his colleagues, we should reflect on his and his party's record in

the Scottish Parliament when it comes to putting sound legislation on the statute book.

Mr Gibson was right to highlight that very few people in the crofting counties are now dependent solely on crofting for their livelihoods. However, crofts and croft land will increasingly be used to provide produce for the ever-increasing number of crofters and farmers markets. As opportunities increase for biomass energy, the need for biomass crops will increase.

The consultation document will play its part in consolidating life and work in rural Scotland and will help to shape the delivery of our rural strategy. It gives us an opportunity to consider new approaches and to take important decisions for the future.

10:28

**Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I welcome the chance to comment on the consultation document on the rural development programme, although I must say that I do not feel that I have got to grips with it—I certainly could not write an essay on its contents. I have many questions, the answers to which might be in the document, but I have not had long to read it and there is a lot to take in. However, the document gives us a chance to talk about the vision for rural Scotland, which is for a place in which we protect and enhance biodiversity and habitats; increase food production and production of non-food crops such as those for biofuels; and, crucially, increase the rural population.

As members have said, the rural environment and landscape have been created by people, who have their place in it, but many factors act against people living and working in rural areas. There is much in the document about joining up government, which I hope does not mean only within the Environment and Rural Affairs Department. A couple of important bills are proceeding through the Parliament—the Crofting Reform etc Bill, which has been mentioned and which I will talk about later if I have time, and the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill. Big planning issues prevent people from making their homes and living in the countryside. Some people might want to live and work in rural areas and do countryside-based activities, while others may have a job that can be done anywhere with modern communications but which they choose to do in the country. I am not talking about people who commute from the country into towns; I am talking about people who live, work and have their family life in the country and who therefore contribute to the wider community in rural areas. Planning constraints make that difficult. I hope that the joining-up that is mentioned will allow those issues to be tackled.

I said that I had trouble getting to grips with what is a fairly weighty document. Shortly after I was elected, I had to try to get to grips with the issue of CAP support and its reform. At that time, we argued about the basis for the single farm payment. Some of us felt that an area basis was better than an historical one, but the historical basis was chosen. However, we must now look towards an exit strategy for that historical basis, because, as we get further from the reference year of 2001, the relevance of that basis lessens. The single farm payment, or tier 1 of the land management contract, makes up the bulk of the support for farming and rural areas—a sum of about £450 million per annum.

The historical basis might tend to perpetuate historical practices. We had a vision from Alex Fergusson about the beautiful countryside that agriculture and farming practices have created, which is true, but that beauty can mask problems. Greenhouse gas emissions, pollution from pesticides and nitrates and habitat loss are aspects of agriculture that everyone would like to be reduced and reversed. On climate change, the consultation document mentions the restoration and protection of natural carbon stores such as peat bogs and woodlands and the enhancement of soil organic matter, which are important in that regard. Other proposals are for targeted fertiliser applications and measures to help agriculture and forestry to adapt to change.

**Ross Finnie:** In advocating, as the member appears to be doing, a radical redistribution of support through the early abandonment of the historical basis for the single farm payment, can she say what financial impact that would have on the agriculture sector in Scotland, which is already fragile?

**Eleanor Scott:** I understand that the change would have an impact, which is why I said that we need to consider the exit strategy for the historical basis; I did not say that it would be easy or that it would not be controversial. At some point, the basis will have to change, so the sooner we start considering that, the better. The historical basis of payments could mean the continuation of public funding for diffuse pollution, which could result in our failing to meet the requirements of the European water framework directive. We need to refine the proposals in the consultation document so that we get best value from the overall pot of money.

I am interested in knowing the minister's thoughts on modulation. My feeling is that we need more cash for agri-environment measures. I understand that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is considering higher rates to prioritise environmental concerns. Paragraph 69 of the consultation document states that EU rules

allow up to 20 per cent voluntary modulation. I am interested in whether the Executive has a level in mind. Paragraph 71 mentions a "stepped increase", but how big will the steps be and how much will the eventual total increase be?

I agree with the theme that runs through the document on simplifying support and having one gateway for the various schemes, which at present are greatly complex. However, I have concerns about how that will work, particularly for the organic sector. Organic farming has an holistic whole-farm approach. I am not clear whether aggregating the support mechanisms will mean that organic farmers have to disaggregate the elements of their holistic approach in order to tick the boxes to claim payments. I am not sure how the process will work or what the role of the organic certifying bodies will be in it. I would be grateful for ministerial clarification of that. I would also be grateful for clarification of the comment on page 8 about bringing in some forestry grant schemes

"in whole or in part".

I am not sure what that means and I want it to be clarified, because we need to enhance forestry for timber and for biomass, as members have said.

I welcome the proposals for the LEADER programme, which has been valuable in encouraging ways of making rural life better. However, I am not clear from the document, although I have probably just missed something, whether the programme will bring its own money or become a competing use for what used to be called pillar 2 funding. I am not clear whether LEADER will bring any more money into the pot.

I am interested in knowing how the bit about local stakeholders in part 3 would work. How would local stakeholders be chosen, how would accountability be addressed and how would agreement on local priorities come about? How would the proposed regional project assessment committees work? Whose priorities would they reflect? Would they hold a budget? How would they be accountable to the local areas? On the issue of local versus national priorities, rather than national priorities feeding down to local areas, local priorities should feed up to the national level. I will be interested to see how that will work and what the balance between local and national will be.

Would the business development schemes just be for on-farm businesses or would they be available to the wider rural community? I would support the latter, even if that meant less cash for farmers. That might be controversial, but business needs to add value within rural communities so that they produce more than just commodities and the raw materials of agricultural products. Sarah

Boyack talked about that. She also mentioned abattoirs in rural areas—a subject that has always been dear to my heart. Such abattoirs are crucial for getting local food networks going. There is a thriving Highlands and Islands local food network, which addresses small-scale, local production for local needs. Local food networks are a real winner and should be supported, not only because of the local jobs that they create but to reduce food miles and for the quality of the product for local use and for the use of visitors to the area.

Processing grants are crucial. Under the previous rural development regulation, I am not sure whether we made full use of all the possible ways in which we could add value to products. I hope that we will give more consideration to that and to keeping people in rural communities—not just on the farm but next to the farm, processing what is produced.

The LFASS has been mentioned. I add my voice to those who say that it is crucial to retain the cattle element of the LFASS. I am very much echoing what is in the SRDP, but it is also recognised by the Scottish Crofting Foundation that cattle are not economically viable in their own right but are essential for environmental reasons. It would not be beyond the bounds of possibility to have, rather than a headage payment for cattle as cattle, a payment for keeping cattle as tools for environmental management. The non-productive capital investment part of the document has some quite descriptive measures, for example

“Woody vegetation control ... involving mechanical cutting and chemical stump treatment”

and rhododendron control by

“cut, rake & burn using excavator”.

If we can have those sorts of things, why can we not have habitat assessment by use of cattle? That seems perfectly reasonable and I am sure that it can be devised without being in breach of any rules.

On crofting, we need to join up the other legislation that is going through Parliament. The Crofting Reform etc Bill is the big one at the moment. How would the integration of measures fit with the proposal in the bill to make the Crofters Commission a non-departmental public body, which would arguably have more autonomy and the ability to start its own schemes? How would that fit in with the one-stop-shop approach that runs through the rural development plan? Finally, on the LFASS, it is crucial that something that is supposed to be for less favoured areas ends up targeting the truly less favoured areas.

10:39

**Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP):** Eleanor Scott’s comment about placing the people who live

and work in the country firmly at the centre of policy was good advice about where the focus of policy should be. The principles that are found in the consultation paper draft proposals are both welcome and refreshing in their wish to devolve power and decision making, but no matter how good the SRDP is, if such devolution of power is not embedded into an overarching policy framework that addresses the unique needs of rural communities, it will fail in its stated objectives. One of the problems is that achieving agreement on such overall objectives is coloured by different perspectives within a massively diverse Scottish rural population, with its range of industries and needs. To succeed, the LEADER programme has to satisfy that diversity and the vastly different outlooks of profit-driven, rural-based small and medium enterprises as well as voluntary local groups based on altruism, which have no profit motive.

There is an inherent danger of diffusion and confusion in merging existing rural groups into such a wider, larger project. The minister should tell us exactly how he will create the necessary cohesion and by what criteria the Government will judge the schemes and their outcomes. I welcome the strategic approach of combining strong economic performance with sustainable use of natural resources, as well as the three main themes and three axes on which they will be built and funded. However, as usual with European documents agreed by negotiation, although the theory may be on the right lines, everything depends on the delivery and on the LEADER approach, through locally driven innovation and partnerships.

This aspirational document requires co-ordinated Government support schemes, fuelling and encouraging innovation on a sustainable basis. Practical measures must be combined to produce outcomes that are complementary. In other words, if encouraging words are to be turned into rural progress and prosperity, actions must be interlinked, complementary, targeted, practical and environmentally friendly. The real question for the minister is how he will achieve that. Does he have the required and essential mechanisms for measuring outcomes, preventing duplication and ensuring value for money? If so, we would all like to hear about them. Do the baseline figures and methodologies exist? We would like to hear about those because they will be the basis of future progress and for checking whether the plans are working and delivering for Scotland.

LEADER is at the centre of those proposals. Although I welcome its local approach, there are problems. The European Commission guide maximum of 100,000 people for individual local action groups does not fit easily into traditional Scottish counties and may hinder any mapping

together of those new administrative units with older, organic communities. Indeed, the minimum level of 10,000 does not cater for island communities, for example. Perhaps a more fluid and logical arrangement is required. The minister must open European eyes to the reality of Scottish needs. Responding to an earlier intervention, the minister skipped over those points, but I seek a Government response to that point when the minister sums up. Based on DEFRA estimates, the Executive believes that Scotland's allocation of EU moneys will be reduced by around 20 per cent compared with 2000 to 2006. Scotland cannot rely on future European funding, especially with the addition of so many new—and welcome—EU members. What reassurances can the minister give regarding security of finance for rural development plans? Plans without appropriate corresponding funding will be little more than a cruel deceit.

The idea of strengthening rural communities is found throughout the consultation document and is implicitly stated in its third theme and third axis. Meeting the economic needs of rural communities must also reinforce their social and cultural cohesion. Central to that are village and community halls, which highlights the inconsistency of the Executive's overall rural strategy. Where in the plan is there any cohesive effort to sustain Scotland's voluntary village hall network? For the average hall, with an annual income of around £5,000, even modest VAT liabilities have a disproportionate impact. Most damaging of all, though, are the compliance burdens. Halls have to change their operating procedures, enforce training on volunteers and spend their valuable monetary resources to comply with reams of new Government legislation and regulation. That is the responsibility of the minister in the Cabinet. Will the minister think again about the future role of village halls as centres for high tech, local services, small business centres, medical services, agricultural information and other activities that will fit into that development? In other words, will he plan and create a 21<sup>st</sup> century role for Scotland's village halls?

When will the Government harness the vast economic and social potential of Scotland's equine and ecotourism industries or, indeed, address the present insecurity of Scotland's agriculture industry, which is at the heart of our rural economy?

A guiding principle of land management contracts is that they should

"provide the basis for moving towards a 'one stop shop' for land managers and other rural actors and a joined-up approach to the administration and delivery of rural funding by the Scottish Executive".

What does "moving towards" mean? How and when will that happen?

There are plenty of good examples of excellent projects that are run by Scottish local councils. I commend the Tayside rural development facilitator project, which supports 70 such initiatives, and the Angus countryside initiative, which introduces urban schoolchildren to farm life and involves more than 3,000 students. I also commend community projects such as Kirkmichael community hall, Lethnot hall community group and the Aberfeldy community cafe, which do not impact on jobs but are important with regard to the creation of sustainable communities. I hope that that will be a major part of what the Executive delivers in implementing this plan. Sustaining rural communities matches employment creation because it builds and maintains strong local links and social networks.

The challenge of the rural development plan is to match rhetoric with reality in order to deliver a viable and vital future for our rural communities.

10:47

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** I agree with Mr Welsh in one regard—

**Mr Welsh:** Only one?

**Jeremy Purvis:** I agree with him in many regards, but the first regard in which I agree with him is in relation to his point that rural Scotland is diverse. There are about the same numbers of occupiers and workers in areas that are designated as less favoured areas as there are in areas that are not and five times as many people work in agriculture outwith the Highlands and Islands as in the Highlands and Islands. The Environment and Rural Development Committee did good work on the definition of accessible rural areas as opposed to sparsely populated rural areas.

**Mr Welsh:** Rural Scotland might be diverse, but the commonality is community spirit and community action. I hope that the member will join me in doing something to ensure that the members of the vast volunteer army who man the community halls throughout Scotland are not driven out of them because of Government policy.

**Jeremy Purvis:** Indeed. Mr Welsh has preempted me somewhat, as I was going to say that I agreed with him on a second aspect. I will do so in due course.

The diverse nature of rural Scotland requires a broad response. The minister's strategy is designed to ensure that rural Scotland is dynamic about harnessing its traditions and its appetite for change; provides opportunities for young people;

offers a high quality of life for all citizens, with access to quality services, which is crucial; and that it sustains and makes the most of its natural and cultural heritage. Those four aspects of the strategic priorities are absolutely right.

Rural Scotland covers 98 per cent of the land and contains 20 per cent of the population. It is integral to all parts of the country's economy, environment and culture. The goals that are set out in the consultation document are right. Key to the plan is the further development of contracts, which has been discussed this morning. Those contracts are all about making farming and forestry more sustainable. Through its three main axes—competitiveness, land management and wider rural development—the EU's rural development regulation covers all the key elements of sustainable development. The aim is to create a rural development policy that capitalises on our assets in rural Scotland.

I hope that the consultation process will touch all parts of Scotland, from the Highlands to the Borders. Even though the budget is not yet known, I am glad that the minister is already planning for how it will impact on the work of turning the strategy into real actions on the ground. I hope that my comments and those of others will shape the minister's thinking in that regard.

I am pleased that the Executive's investment will be in the shape of payments to sustain the environment and other rural infrastructure that provides public value for people and businesses, which can capitalise on a good environment, and in the shape of one-off investments in rural development projects. That will help to overcome market failure in many of our constituencies and will enable businesses to move away from long-term dependence on Government funds.

I wish to record my admiration of many of my constituents who are hill farmers in the Borders. Many of those families have been farming in the Borders for generations. Sometimes, we fail to understand that those farmers and their families are stewards of the land that they have been farming for centuries and that sustaining the environment and rural infrastructure is as important to them as it is to the Government.

I wish to focus on four aspects: rural living; rural working; diversification and innovation; and leisure. Through those aspects runs the thread of communities, which Mr Welsh spoke about.

Rural living is important with regard to young people living and working in rural communities. That requires good schooling, health services and retail opportunities. Housing is also increasingly important. Maureen Watt was right to point to issues in Aberdeenshire in relation to rural schools. This is a cross-party issue. Angus

Council and Scottish Borders Council—respectively Conservative led and independent led—are tackling the issue of providing a schooling infrastructure that is sustainable and responsive to parents' requests.

Presiding Officer, I know that you take a particular interest in housing planning in extremely rural areas. Communities Scotland does not sufficiently understand that in many of our communities the requirement for housing is such that housing policies must be creative. Housing grants should be made available to extremely small-scale developments and the updating or conversion of farm steadings, which can create valuable assets. Indeed, Communities Scotland should work in partnership with some of our local estates as well as our local authorities. It is important that we get this policy correct. The asset value of some farm steadings is incredibly high. In areas in the south of Scotland and those that are connected to a city region, it is vital that we release those steadings for housing, rather than just for commercial gain. The overall value of agricultural assets has risen from £415 million in 2004 to more than £14.5 billion. However, as the value of the assets increases, the investment in farming activities is falling. In 2000, farmers invested £196 million in farming and provisional figures show that, by 2003, that had fallen to £143 million. It is expected that the figures for 2004 will show that, although the level of investment picked up during that year, it did not reach previous levels. Of course, many of our rural areas are dependent not only on public sector but on private sector investment. A third of the gross domestic product of my constituency derives from agriculture and land-based industries and private sector investment in farming enterprises is important.

On working in rural areas, salaries are lower than the average income across Scotland. For example, in relation to shepherding—of which there is a long tradition in my family—and labouring, employers involved in those activities are, realistically, competing against Tesco and Asda. In my constituency, Tesco and Asda will double their presence in Galashiels, which will make the environment even more competitive. Young people who might have thought about going into land-based agriculture industries might, instead, be attracted to other types of employment.

The employment trend is worrying for Scotland as a whole, as the average age of males who work on main holdings is increasing. Between 1993 and 2003, the proportion of farm workers who were aged between 35 and 65 rose from 48 per cent to 59 per cent, and the proportion of males under the age of 35 who worked on main holdings fell from

47 per cent in 1993 to 36 per cent in 2003. There is little indication that that trend is changing.

The charts detailing the occupiers, spouses and employees on main and minor holdings between 1995 and 2004, which were published in the interesting economic report on Scottish agriculture, also show a clear trend of falling numbers of full-time employees and an increase in the numbers of both part-time employees and casual or seasonal employees. I hope that the Executive is studying that. It would be interesting to know how many workers in the growing areas of casual and part-time labour are immigrants, whether in the fruit-picking industry in the north-east or in the fish-processing industry in the Borders. The increase in the number of immigrant workers—especially those from central and eastern Europe—is a new and, I think, growing issue in Scotland's rural development. It brings its own issues although, by and large, it is extremely welcome. One of my concerns about the growing trend of farmers employing immigrant workers is that, in many cases, the workers are exploited. We must ensure that immigrant workers in the agricultural labour force are protected.

With regard to diversification and innovation, it is welcome that there are relief schemes for agricultural land and buildings that are used for non-agricultural purposes. The document "A Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture: Next Steps" is good and makes some concrete suggestions as to the way forward. The strategic group that the minister has established, which includes the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise Borders, who is to take a lead through the enterprise network for rural Scotland, is also very good. I hope that the group will address the procurement issue that Ms Boyack mentioned and on which the minister responded. The current procurement method for school meals is not the way forward for Scotland. Food procurement at the Edinburgh royal infirmary is absolutely hopeless: frozen food is driven up the M6 from Wales and reheated in the hospital. I know that it is a difficult issue and that the Executive is considering it closely, not only in the context of procurement from local suppliers, but in the context of EU procurement rules and Scotland's role within those. However, if we are to persuade Tesco and Asda to procure from local suppliers, the public sector should take a lead in its own areas of responsibility.

Crucially, there are steps for Scottish agriculture to take in renewable energy, from using biomass on farms or in industries to growing biofuels such as oil-seed rape or coppice. There is also potential for the small-scale incineration of local business waste. However, I am wary that the changes from the Treasury will mean that there will be more importing of processed products rather than the

promotion of the indigenous biofuels industry. That is another area in which the Executive is taking a close interest and in which the public sector can take a lead, whether through the provision of incentives in Scotland, under devolved powers, or through having far more of our public services using biofuels.

Small communities and new developments could also make use of small-scale renewable technologies, from micro-hydro to micro-combined heat and power technologies. That will be important in rural Scotland as well as in our agricultural industry. I recently hosted an energy summit in the Borders to which more than 500 members of the public came, including many farmers. That open day was arranged by the Southern Uplands Partnership to enable people to learn not only how micro-hydro techniques can be used on their land, but how they can benefit the local communities of which they are an integral part.

Finally, I turn to leisure. The subject has not come up much in the debate, but I think that it will be important. Mr Welsh mentioned the need for support for equestrian tourism—that is the third aspect of his speech with which I agree. I hope that he recognises the symmetry in my speech of agreeing with him at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. There is rich potential for equestrian tourism throughout Scotland and in the Borders in particular, as it has by far the best traditions of equestrian leisure activities in Europe.

There are many other leisure opportunities across rural Scotland, from mountain biking in Glentworth and Fort William to the long salmon fishing season on our wonderful rivers. Many rural areas both qualify for less favoured area status and are connected to the city regions and will benefit from the growing affluence in those regions through a focus on leisure. There are rich opportunities in that for our land-based industries, and the Borders region is well placed, in the key area between Edinburgh and Glasgow and Manchester and Newcastle, to benefit from such tourism opportunities.

At the heart of rural development, as Mr Welsh said, are our communities. We should not forget that our farming communities are integral to many of those and that, if they decline through not investing, the communities that we represent will decline with them. I am sure that the Executive's policies and the strategy are the right way forward. As Mr Welsh said, we need to see the action that those policies propose; however, I know that the minister is committed and I am sure that he will respond positively to the results of the consultation process that he has announced.

11:01

**Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)**

**(Con):** The debate has been interesting and far reaching. Too often, the Parliament does not pay enough attention to rural Scotland and to the difficulties of those who live and work in our farming sector and countryside—especially the remoter parts. That is why I welcome the Executive's consultation on the rural development programme for Scotland for the next six years. I hope that it will be a real chance for farmers and other stakeholders to engage in the discussion process, so that the people who know the industry best will have the major say in its future. Andrew Welsh was right to say that people must be at the heart of the plan. The minister seeks written contributions, and it is to the credit of the NFUS that meetings are already being organised throughout rural Scotland to encourage people from the countryside to voice their concerns about their future. I have held meetings with farmers in north-east Fife and I am pleased to say that I will meet a similar group in Perth tomorrow.

Several members have spoken about the parlous state of farming in their areas. In the part of Scotland where I live, north-east Fife, we have seen a further fall in farm incomes of around 12 per cent from an already historically low base, and the average age of local farmers is now over 63 years. Farming has seen bad times before, but morale in farming—once a thriving and prosperous sector and the major employer in Fife—has seldom been lower. As Alex Fergusson reminded us in his excellent speech, it is only by securing a profitable farming sector that we will secure the future of the environment. Maureen Watt, who is no longer in the chamber, also paid tribute to the land management skills of our farmers over the years, and I agree with that.

The consultation paper for the rural development programme for the next six years asks for views on the Executive's goals for sustainable rural development. As we have heard, one of the main planks of the Executive's policy is the less favoured areas support scheme, to which Ross Finnie referred in his opening speech and which Alex Fergusson and others have dealt with at length. I echo what other members—particularly Alex Fergusson and Alasdair Morgan—said, and I share their view that we do not want resources to be diverted from standard areas of farming to fragile areas. In our view, that would be bankrupting Peter to buy off Paul with a vengeance. Alternative means must be considered to sustain all sectors of the industry.

I am encouraged by evidence that the Environment and Rural Development Committee has heard recently about biomass. There are exciting opportunities in biomass, especially in

agroforestry and the growing of oil-seed rape to produce biofuel. The Executive must act on the committee's excellent report. Too often, other countries have surged ahead because we have not grasped the opportunities that have been presented to us or because we have not put the right support in place at the right time. I hope to return to that point later.

The next proposal that needs to be examined is the suggestion that several existing schemes be merged into the land management contracts by bringing together varied schemes such as the organic aid scheme and the rural stewardship scheme. I hope that that will reduce bureaucracy. The contracts are to be welcomed as long as the scheme does not become an unmanageable leviathan.

I am also cautious about the setting up of regional project assessment committees. In no way should those be allowed to undermine the excellent work of the Scottish Agricultural College and the farming and wildlife advisory group, both of which already provide support and information for farmers, land managers and all those who work in rural Scotland. Another quango with added layers of bureaucracy for the farmers is in no one's interest.

I agree with Sarah Boyack, Jeremy Purvis, Eleanor Scott and others that one of the key issues that ministers must tackle urgently is the weeping sore that is the food supply chain. It is a national scandal that farm-gate prices are often barely above production costs while, only this week, we saw supermarket profits continuing to soar. The supermarket code of conduct simply is not working and suppliers such as Kettle Produce Ltd—one of the biggest employers in north-east Fife—are being forced to lay off staff because of skewed contractual agreements with the retail multiples. Ministers must get an urgent response from the Office of Fair Trading so that they can take action. Sarah Boyack was also right to raise the issue of co-operation and partnerships to achieve some kind of unity in dealing with the multiples.

Several speakers mentioned the case of avian flu at Cellardyke in my region of Fife. I am pleased to read press reports that tourism—such a vital sector of rural Scotland—has not been adversely affected. We are all relieved that it appears to have been an isolated incident. It would be churlish not to praise the minister and his officials for what appeared to be a prompt and appropriate response. On the avian front, I echo the hopes of various speakers that the minister will respond to the hopes of RSPB Scotland and others that cattle will continue to be reared on upland areas to allow the continuation of our richly diverse range of wild

birds that contribute so much to tourism in Scotland.

Sarah Boyack was also right to ask us to check whether the consultation document really joins up the dots. She was right to highlight the future role of climate change and, no doubt, we will also have to consider seriously the requirement for investment in the most effective renewables for rural areas. All those issues will have to be dealt with against a background of changing financial circumstances and the need for sustainable rural communities. Nowhere is there a more urgent need for all the dots to be joined up.

I do not want to challenge the spirit of consensus—that would be so unlike me—so I say that I hope that the rural development plan is one of the Executive's more successful initiatives. However, through seven years of this coalition, rural Scotland has had to endure some of the Parliament's most damaging legislation, from access reform to tenancy reform.

**Alasdair Morgan:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mr Brocklebank:** I am coming to the end of my speech.

The Executive has failed to address the continuing problems in the dairy and arable sectors, and has failed to stem the decline and loss of traditional family farms. Judging by the responses to the Crofting Reform etc Bill that we have heard so far, there is much work still to do. I was, however, encouraged to hear from Alasdair Morrison that those issues can be worked through, although that is not the public profile that he has adopted thus far.

We can only hope that this new rural development plan is the first step of a new Executive approach to rural Scotland. On past evidence and experience, and given my well-known predilection for pessimism, I will end by quoting the bard:

"forward though I canna see, I guess an' fear".

11:09

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** It is a pity that Ted Brocklebank reverted to type in his closing remarks and came away with some of the nonsense that we have heard from the Conservatives in previous years. When he talked about the damage that is caused by the legislation on access, I was going to offer him a chance to list objectively some of that damage. When the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill was going through the Parliament, he said that that would happen but some of us are hard-pressed to see that damage; we pointed that out at the time.

However, Mr Brocklebank did me the favour of referring to the past seven years. In his opening speech, the minister laid out the positives and negatives of working and living in rural Scotland. It struck me that the problem is that he could have said all that six years ago. He probably did; I have a copy of the speech that he made when the Parliament met in Glasgow in May 2000, when he launched "Rural Scotland: A New Approach May 2000". I criticised that document for being glossy. I notice that the new document has no photographs in it, so my remarks must have got through. I am glad that the minister took my advice.

The final paragraph of the May 2000 document is worth mentioning. It talks of

"acknowledging, understanding and tackling issues so that we are in a position to measure progress against the aims set out in this document."

Perhaps I have missed it—there are a lot of Government documents—but I have not seen the analysis that was referred to in that May 2000 document. Some reference to the success and failure of what was promised and planned in May 2000 might have been useful in the formation of our approach to the next six years. We are in a not dissimilar situation now and, again, I do not necessarily know that the new document contains the objectives and measures that those of us who are lucky enough to be here in six years' time—although hopefully not in this room—will have to come back and analyse. Andrew Welsh made the point about the need to set objectives so that we can measure progress. If we do not do that, we will be in the same straitjacket in six years' time, with the majority of funding being preordained because of decisions that are made by our masters in London and Europe and any targeting that we can do being very much at the edges of Government expenditure.

Rob Gibson mentioned SEERAD and its family of agencies. It was amusing to think that that is at least one family that is moving into rural Scotland as opposed to the others who are moving out. It is, however, a very serious point. John Swinney made the point that all the issues and improvements that the minister talked about in relation to farming, the environment, water and so on, are accompanied by bureaucracy. I admit that I do not think that anyone has cracked that problem and, in the meantime, as John Swinney pointed out, we struggle to get one quango to appreciate the difficulties that it causes to people in other areas.

An example of that is the charges that are about to be introduced for private water supplies in small businesses in the tourism sector. It is not clear to us that there has been any interaction with regard to the environmental needs that are allegedly driving those charges—although I have no



evidence of a great deal of sickness being caused by bad private water supplies in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in Scotland—and there seems to be very little recognition of the costs or the problems that will be caused by that environmental requirement on the tourism industry. The lack of joined-up activity between Government and its agencies is a major issue in rural areas.

Post offices are another example. This morning, I received through the post a helpful article that contains a quotation from Stephen Byers, another one of Mr Blair's lost ministers—the list seems to be growing. When he was in power, he said:

"We have a vision of a network of post offices equipped with the latest technology in every high street and rural area, offering an increasing range of services for an ever greater number of clients."

How many rural post offices in the areas that are represented by the members present could be described in that way? Very few, I suspect, particularly when the Post Office card account appears to be going down the tubes. A great part of that vision is under threat.

In May 2000, Ross Finnie said:

"The closure of a bank, a shop or a post office can often be seen as a major threat to that community's future."—[*Official Report*, 25 May 2000; Vol 6, c 1081.]

That is correct, but it seems to us that there is no coherent strategy or objective standard across rural Scotland on the appropriate level of provision, whether it be commercial, educational or medical. I suspect that the minister might respond that objective standards are impossible to achieve and that I should submit to the consultation exercise my suggestions on what those objective standards should be, but it seems to me that whether rural services survive or cease to exist is currently due more to accident than design. That issue needs to be addressed.

Following the setting up of the Rural Affairs Department, which we all agreed would be a step forward if it delivered what it set out to do, the minister said:

"we needed to move from the traditional departmental approach to policy making to a more cross-cutting style of government."—[*Official Report*, 25 May 2000; Vol 6, c 1078.]

We all agreed with that, but I am not convinced that the change has happened to the extent that is required. For example, are the village halls that Andrew Welsh mentioned recognised as important? Is there a strategy for village halls? Does Scottish Water know about that strategy? Does anyone in central Government actually care? Does anyone centrally know how many village halls Scotland has? I suspect that they do not.

Another area in which Government can play an important role is procurement. In that context,

Jeremy Purvis raised an issue about the supermarkets. It is strange that we all have a hang-up about supermarkets given that we live in a capitalist society. It seems that it is good for a company to be capitalist until its profits reach a certain size, at which point it becomes bad. Perhaps some of us need to sort out our ideas on how successful we want our businesses to be. However, leaving that aside, I agree that there is an issue about how the supermarkets obtain some of their profits.

**Jeremy Purvis:** The member will recall that I said that we need to persuade Tesco, Asda and others. Going down the compulsory or statutory route is not the only answer. To some extent, we need to persuade the supermarkets to work closely with local farming communities on procurement. The answer is not simply to force businesses to do things, but to work with them.

**Alasdair Morgan:** I quite agree. We live in a democracy. If we start telling one business what to do, where will things stop? We do not want to go down the route of Soviet-style planning. We need to persuade the supermarkets of the advantages of buying produce from the people who will be their customers. They need to see the benefit of that for themselves.

However—I think that Jeremy Purvis also made this valuable point—how can we expect the supermarkets to do that if the Government does not set a lead in its own procurement? Are those of us who think that other EU countries carry out procurement in a different way simply wrong? Are other countries allowed to get away with more than we get away with? That charge is often made in the chamber, but I do not think that it has been rebutted. I certainly think that supermarkets in France tend to provide more local produce than supermarkets in Scotland do.

Another issue that I will mention briefly seems, strangely enough, almost tangential to the debate because it is not covered in the rural development programme. The strategic plan does not mention pillar 1 funding, which is the most substantial element of support that goes to rural Scotland. We never seem to analyse just how successful or unsuccessful our expenditure on rural development and agriculture has been in Scotland over the past 50 years. It might be useful to have a debate on that at some stage, although I realise that our debate would not have as much influence as we would like over the final decisions, which are taken at increasingly higher levels.

Jeremy Purvis made a valid point about the vast reduction in employment in agriculture that has taken place over the past 50 or 100 years. Since the common agricultural policy was introduced, that rate of reduction has continued. Of course, as that decline has continued, the leakage of funds

out of rural areas has also proceeded. For example, I received an e-mail yesterday from a dairy farmer, who writes:

"for us there is no point in Dairying or farming for that matter and we have decided to cut our losses and run. Our animals were valued this morning by a dealer and as we expected are not worth a great deal, however the gentleman valuing our stock was able to tell us of 3 dairy herds in close proximity that are resigning from milk production and farms are up for sale."

Clearly, all is not well with whatever system we have at present.

It is clear that rural Scotland is changing and, unfortunately, declining in many ways, at least in terms of the services that it provides and the youthfulness of its population. Alasdair Morrison may like to claim that certain rural areas are growing in population, but such growth depends very much on how we draw the boundaries. If we draw a boundary that includes Inverness as part of a rural region, the figures will suggest that the rural population is increasing, but I doubt that that is a meaningful statistic. Certainly, in terms of the number of people who live outside the major settlements, the population of rural Scotland is declining.

However, while Scotland's rural areas seem to be declining, they are probably becoming more important for Scotland as a whole. They are an important economic resource for agriculture and for tourism businesses, which are often run by people who were, or still are, involved in agriculture. Rural areas are also important for smaller businesses and industries that, thanks to modern technologies, no longer need to be located anywhere near urban, or even for that matter rural, centres.

Rural Scotland is very diverse; Andrew Welsh made a good point about that. One disappointing thing about the debate has been that certain speeches gave the impression that rural development should simply be about agriculture. It is not. Rural development is also about non-agricultural industries and organisations within the rural community that have no profit motive. It is perhaps not surprising that the debate took on that tone given the context of the document on which the debate was based. However, as the document's description of axis 3 makes clear, rural development is about

"Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity".

That is an important point, although it is not clear to me how the proposals in the document will achieve that aim and simultaneously maintain a sustainable agriculture.

I hope that I have left the minister sufficient, but not too much, time to respond to all the points that have been raised.

11:22

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin):** I thank all members present for attending the debate despite the other pressing matters that might have called them away today. I also thank members for contributing a great number of insightful and informed comments on the wide range of issues that are relevant to the rural development programme for Scotland. I will take a few minutes to sum up the debate and to provide some observations on and responses to the issues and discussions that have taken place.

The new rural development programme for Scotland offers a landmark opportunity to reflect on the challenges and opportunities that face our rural areas. It also allows us to consider how the support that we provide for rural development can best deliver benefits, both for those who live and work in rural areas and for the wider population of Scotland and beyond, for whom rural Scotland is a hugely important asset.

Many members highlighted the importance of an integrated approach to rural development and we absolutely agree with that. The new rural development plan will of course sit firmly within our sustainable development strategy. I can assure Sarah Boyack and others that our climate change strategy has major implications for the way in which we use land in Scotland. A strategic environmental assessment of the rural development programme is also being conducted and will be put out to consultation in mid-May. Given that every action that we take now will have an impact on future generations, we believe that the plan provides us with a unique opportunity to build a sustainable rural Scotland for the future.

We believe that the schemes that are proposed for the new SRDP will show our aspiration to implement just such an integrated approach, in which the competitiveness of rural businesses is supported alongside the delivery of public benefits for the environment and the improved well-being of rural communities. Clearly, we have an opportunity to develop measures under the land management contract scheme that will contribute to multiple objectives. That is an attempt at the joined-up thinking to which many members referred. As Ross Finnie demonstrated when he opened the debate, that is an important aspect of our proposals that I would like to underline. For example, we are keen to see the further integration of agriculture and forestry and for forestry to play a full part in delivering multiple objectives on, for example, business diversification, biodiversity, recreation and tourism, biomass and climate change.

Members will have seen the importance in our proposals of forming a programme that delivers

measures that are tailored to the needs of local areas. Many members mentioned that point. At the same time, we must meet our national and international objectives and obligations. As members are aware, it is essential to deliver a programme that recognises the diversity of Scotland's farming and forestry systems, environment and rural communities. We believe that our proposals for regional guidance for applicants and for a network of regional assessment committees will allow land managers and others to develop high-quality applications that reflect local circumstances and will allow funds to be directed to projects that address local needs and opportunities.

**Jeremy Purvis:** The minister will be aware that, in general, structural funds have an important impact on agriculture and rural development, especially in the Borders and the south of Scotland. Does she share my concern that there are proposals that would mean that there was no longer a south of Scotland programme area for structural funds, which would reduce the considerable value that is added by the kind of co-operation that she has eloquently outlined? Will the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department argue forcefully for a south of Scotland programme area, so that we can have the very local delivery that she has indicated with regard to the future of structural funds?

**Rhona Brankin:** I am aware of the importance of structural funds and the difference that they have made to many areas of Scotland, including the south of Scotland. As the member is aware, no final decisions have been taken about the new structural funds that will be put in place. I am sure that the member will be more than able to make his concerns known to Ross Finnie, other ministers and me, as he has just done.

The strategic plan for the new programme makes clear the importance of adding value locally to Scottish products. Many members have recognised the importance of that. The current consultation proposes measures to address the objective. We want to see further development of processing and marketing of Scottish products to retain income and employment benefits in Scotland. We have major opportunities to build on our strengths in order to provide distinctive, high-quality products. Key factors in such success include entrepreneurship, co-operation and innovation among Scottish producers, our renowned high standards of animal health and welfare and the development of market opportunities associated with the high quality of Scotland's natural heritage.

Many members have emphasised the need for local people to be involved in local rural development plans. The introduction of the

LEADER initiative into the SRDP will provide scope for flexible approaches to development that are based on the knowledge of local communities and the distinctive natural and cultural assets that exemplify rural Scotland. Ministers look forward to seeing a wide range of innovative projects emerging through the LEADER approach. LEADER has the potential to add a new dimension to the SRDP that will build the capacity of rural communities to improve their well-being.

Several members mentioned crofting. I reaffirm the importance that the Executive attaches to crofting and to communities in remote and island locations. Crofting communities are an essential part of our system of land management, our community life and our cultural heritage. The Crofting Reform etc Bill that was introduced earlier this year is an important piece of legislation that will bring important changes for crofting and crofting communities, for wider rural development and for the Crofters Commission. It is a central piece of legislation on land reform as well as a key element in the Labour-Liberal Democrat partnership's commitment to crofting and the Highlands and Islands.

I remind members that we have already created a major new right to buy specifically for crofting communities in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, which the Conservatives have again criticised. That is a massive level of commitment that demonstrates how much we value crofting. In his speech today, Alasdair Morrison was right to talk about the entrepreneurship that has been unleashed by land reform. I recognise that the continuation of land reform will be important. The new Crofting Reform etc Bill supports that, by allowing new crofts such as woodland crofts to be created. The facility to create new crofts in Scotland is hugely exciting. There is potential for hundreds of new crofts to be created.

The consultation document on the SRDP includes a proposal to redistribute some LFA funding towards very fragile areas. Clearly, there is concern about that issue. We take cognisance of the various views that have been expressed today, and I urge members to make their views known in the consultation. The proposal to redistribute LFA funding is in recognition of the particular difficulties that are faced by farmers and crofters in very fragile areas and of the important environmental contribution that they make on land that is highly valued for its natural heritage. Our commitment to crofting's environmental contribution was recognised by the decision this year to allow applications from common grazings committees to be eligible for measures under tier 2 of the land management contracts.

We must ensure that the new programme meets the requirements of the new rural development

regulation. However, it is essential that our proposals minimise bureaucracy and achieve streamlined delivery of the measures that are proposed. Many members made reference to the need for that. People who work on the land or who are involved in land management do not want to sink under a weight of bureaucracy. Bringing together wide-ranging measures under land management contracts is designed to achieve greater streamlining. I would welcome views in the consultation on how we can ensure efficiency in implementing the programme.

Forestry will be a key part of the integrated approach to the new programme. The new rural development regulation recognises forestry as a key land use, and I welcome the fact that forestry is integrated throughout the regulation. That will bring new opportunities for support—in the area of business development, for example. We are reviewing the Scottish forestry grant scheme—a public consultation will be launched shortly—and we want to ensure that incentives for woodland creation are maintained. Reference has been made to the recent unprecedented demand for support through the Scottish forestry grants scheme. As has been said, the Forestry Commission Scotland has been required to bring forward the closing date of the scheme from August. I look forward to the key role that forestry will play under the new programme. I remind members that forests and woodlands now cover 17 per cent of Scotland. Our focus now is on targeting investments in planting and sustainable forest management on areas in which the greatest public benefit will be delivered. As members have recognised, the climate change strategy commits us to increasing the proportion of land under forest in Scotland.

Members have referred to organic farming. As members know, the Executive is committed to organic farming. We have worked and continue to work closely with industry stakeholders to develop a strategy, targets and support mechanisms to encourage and help farmers to enter the organic sector. Our commitment is demonstrated by the inclusion of organic targets in the partnership agreement. Our support for organic farming and progress towards meeting our targets are set out in the organic action plan, which was published in 2003, and in the two annual reports that have been published since then. Rightly, the targets are ambitious, but we have delivered substantially on them by significantly increasing the finance that is available to farmers who wish to convert to organic farming. For example, since 2003, the payment rate for conversion of arable land has more than doubled. We have also helped to develop the infrastructure that is needed to increase the proportion of Scottish organic sales that can be supplied by home-grown produce from 35 per cent in 2003 to 70 per cent in 2005.

The integration of the organic aid scheme into land management contracts will allow us to continue to support and enhance organic production in Scotland. Ross Finnie stated that we propose to integrate some national support schemes into the programme. A wide range of schemes have been proposed, and it will be important for local and regional interests to make judgments about what is most important to them. We must ensure that the important contributions of the schemes to our desired policy outcomes and obligations are sustained. We very much welcome views on the proposals in responses to the consultation.

A key requirement for the next SRDP to be truly effective is that it complements other funding streams that are available to support the environment and communities in rural areas. It is essential that consistency is achieved between the SRDP and other programmes, so that we can be confident that the available resources are put to most effective use. For example, the effectiveness of measures in the SRDP that provide facilities for recreation and tourism will depend, in part, on the achievements of other programmes of assistance that underpin the wider infrastructure on which the tourism sector depends. I emphasise, as many members have done, that we must see the SRDP as part of a much bigger rural picture.

We know that we will receive a reduced amount of EU funding for the next SRDP although, as Ross Finnie indicated, Brussels has not yet notified us of our allocation—we hope to receive that notification in May. Meanwhile, Scottish Executive officials are examining options for bringing adequate resources into the SRDP.

The level of voluntary modulation during the new programme will depend on the final allocation of EU funds from Brussels and the resources that are available from the Scottish Executive budget. It will also, of course, depend on the resources that are required to meet policy outcomes. I emphasise that the budgetary arrangements must be implemented in a way that respects pressures on the stability of farm incomes.

**Alex Fergusson:** Can the minister give us an assurance that any further increase in the rate of modulation will be match funded by the Treasury? I raised that point in my speech.

**Rhona Brankin:** Of course, we cannot give members that reassurance now, but we are working closely with our colleagues south of the border to ensure that we get the funding package right. I am sure that Alex Fergusson will continue to make his views known during the consultation. We hope to be able to bring information to the Parliament as soon as possible.

**Mr Welsh:** Will the minister give way?

**Rhona Brankin:** I would like to get on, as I want to touch on a couple of other issues.

We think that the current less favoured areas scheme recognises the additional costs of farming in fragile and very fragile areas and the important environmental contribution that is made by farming in those areas. Cross-compliance under the new rural development regulation means that the statutory management requirements and good agricultural and environmental condition requirements will apply to less favoured areas.

I will have to close, but I would like to mention one matter.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):** You have just over two minutes left.

**Rhona Brankin:** Thank you. I recognise that.

Rightly, several members have raised the important issue of how we evaluate the process. I reassure members that we are working on a baseline analysis of economic, social and environmental issues. The new rural development regulation sets out a common EU monitoring and evaluation framework. We will add indicators that are specific to Scotland and which reflect our own priorities in Scotland. I urge members to give some thought to how we can best do that.

I remind members that the consultation process has almost nine weeks to run. We want there to be a fruitful discussion of the many important issues that are raised in the plan. To that end, we will hold a series of public meetings in late May and June in locations in south, central and northern Scotland and in the islands. Arrangements for the meetings are currently being made and further details will be advertised in the local media. I urge all those with an interest to take the opportunity that will be provided by those meetings to make their views known.

I thank members once again for their contributions to the debate.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I suspend the meeting until 11.40.

11:39

*Meeting suspended.*

11:40

*On resuming—*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### General Questions

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** Question 1 has been withdrawn.

#### Free Personal Care (Meal Preparation)

**2. David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions the Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform has had with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Minister for Health and Community Care about the financial implications of providing assistance with meal preparation for those entitled to free personal care. (S2O-9599)

**The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe):** That matter falls to the Minister for Health and Community Care to discuss with the delivery agent, which in this case is local government.

**David McLetchie:** The minister will be aware that a large financial bill is attached to the outcome of those discussions. Is he aware that in many instances—involving councils all over Scotland—people have been charged for assistance with meal preparation when it should have been provided free of charge following the introduction of free personal care in July 2002? Does he agree that when people have been wrongly charged—I have already established that one of my constituents has been—councils should fully refund them? In respect of the discussions with COSLA, has the Scotland-wide cost of making such refunds been estimated?

**Mr McCabe:** I will deal with the second question first. I do not have any information about the discussions with COSLA. They are being conducted by the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care.

I will make a general response to the first question. I support any move to refund charges that have been levied if it is established that they have been inappropriately charged. The member may wish to know that we have made available for free personal care £153 million in 2005-06, £162 million in 2006-07 and £169 million in 2007-08. Those are considerable sums of money. Currently, 41,000 individuals benefit from free personal care at home and a further 9,000 benefit in care homes. As a general response, if it is established that

anyone has been inappropriately charged, redress should be sought and given.

**Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP):** The minister will be aware that schedule 1 to the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002 is explicit: the preparation of food should not be charged for. What discussions has he had with local authorities, half of which have been charging for meal preparation? Should the Executive make it clear to all local authorities that no one should be charged for meal preparation, what financial discussions will the minister have with local authorities?

**Mr McCabe:** It would obviously be wrong of me to predetermine the outcome of discussions that are being held with COSLA not by me, but by my colleague the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care.

### Rule of 85

**3. Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to review its current stance on abolishing the rule of 85. (S2O-9595)

**The Minister for Finance and Public Service Reform (Mr Tom McCabe):** The Scottish Executive has reviewed and tested the legal advice and we have concluded that the rule of 85 has to be removed to be consistent with European Council directive 2000/78/EC. We are in discussions with trade unions, people who are employed in local government and other people who are covered by the scheme, because we recognise that its removal creates an anomaly.

**Mr Swinney:** The minister will be aware—because he took part in it—that we had a constructive debate on the matter last week in Parliament. In the interests of ensuring that the debate can continue, is the minister prepared to publish the legal advice to which he referred, which somehow undermines what is, in my opinion, pretty persuasive legal advice that is contrary to the position that he has outlined? Its publication would enable us properly to scrutinise the advice on the basis of which the Executive is operating, and would ensure that individuals who are involved in the negotiations with the Executive have confidence in the quality of information upon which ministers have made their decisions.

**Mr McCabe:** The member will be aware that it is in the nature of such matters that different legal opinions can be procured by different individuals. The Scottish Executive has done all that it can to ensure that the legal advice that is available to us is robust. We have tested the legal advice, and it remains consistent.

Although we have made available to the trade unions and employers a summary of the legal

advice and the rationale that lies behind it through the discussions that we are having on the subject, there are very good reasons why we will not publish the legal advice. When the Scottish Executive enters court, it does so on behalf of the Scottish taxpayer. We are not in the business of going into court with one arm tied behind our back, or of sending our legal representatives into court in that way. Legal arguments have to be advanced in court. It would be unfair on the Scottish taxpayer to adopt a policy of making the other side aware ahead of proceedings of all the legal advice that is available to us.

### Hate Crimes

**4. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it intends, during this parliamentary session, to introduce a statutory aggravation for offences motivated by malice or ill-will towards an individual based on sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability, as recommended by the working group on hate crime. (S2O-9655)

**The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry):** In the debate on the legislative programme on 6 September last year, I announced that we intend to strengthen the laws that deal with hate crime. That remains our intention. The Scottish Executive is committed to tackling prejudice in all its forms, as we believe it has no place in our society.

**Patrick Harvie:** If that means that a statutory aggravation will be introduced, I warmly welcome it.

It is 18 months since the working group on hate crime reported its 14 or so recommendations, and a full year since the Executive told me that it would respond in due course. Will the minister confirm when the Executive will respond to all the recommendations, and not only to the three recommendations that relate to new legislation?

**Hugh Henry:** As Patrick Harvie is aware, the working group's recommendations are wide ranging and impact on a number of different areas, including the criminal justice system, the education curriculum, new legislation and media reporting, to name but a few. We have given very careful consideration to all the proposals. I assure Patrick Harvie that we will issue a formal response to the working group in the near future.

It is fair to say that, in the meantime, where new legislation is not required, we have made progress on many of the recommendations.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Is the minister aware of the difficulties that the police face in administering the law as it stands? I am thinking of the problem of our overcrowded courts. Does he accept that it is nonsense to introduce

legislation that is almost unenforceable? Surely legislation has to be prioritised.

**Hugh Henry:** It is not the Executive's intention—nor is it, I believe, the intention of the Parliament—to introduce legislation that is unenforceable. Since the creation of the Parliament, the Executive has consistently introduced legislation that makes a difference to people's quality of life.

Some things that happen in our society are abhorrent. It is right to put that on the record. I hope that neither Phil Gallie nor his party is suggesting that those in our society who suffer physical and verbal attacks for whatever reason should be left unprotected. The police do the job, and they do it to the best of their ability. I recognise the difficult circumstances under which they operate at times. That said, the Parliament would find it totally unacceptable if the Executive abandoned those in our society who suffer as a result of their views, status, gender or any other factor.

#### **Antisocial Behaviour Orders (South Lanarkshire)**

**5. Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how many antisocial behaviour orders have been applied for in South Lanarkshire and how many have been granted by courts in Lanark and Hamilton respectively. (S2O-9627)

**The Deputy Minister for Justice (Hugh Henry):** A survey of local authorities in Scotland reveals that 51 antisocial behaviour orders were applied for and 17 orders were granted in South Lanarkshire in the period 2002-03 to 2004-05. We do not hold information centrally on the number of orders that are applied for and granted in particular courts.

**Karen Gillon:** The minister is aware of concerns in my constituency that the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004 is not being used as vigorously and effectively as it could be. Indeed, the minister is to visit my constituency this evening to hear directly the concerns of local residents. What steps can the Executive take to ensure that the police and local authorities work together to use the full force of the law so that communities such as those in my constituency do not suffer from antisocial behaviour, as the act intended?

**Hugh Henry:** Karen Gillon highlights a particularly sensitive issue. The Executive's legislative programme has been delivered in this regard: we created the 2004 act to tackle the problem of antisocial behaviour and we provided substantial resources to do so. We need to consider carefully the next step. We do not interfere in the operational independence of the police. It is up to chief constables to use resources and to decide, through their officers, the ways in

which they will enforce the act in their localities. The Executive also does not attempt to interfere in the independence of local authorities to deliver services in their areas. If there is a failure in any part of Scotland to use the powers under the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004, local members, councillors and communities need to ask councils and the police why they are not using the powers that were granted to them.

I have had representations from other members with constituencies in the Strathclyde area. For example, it appears from the evidence that dispersal orders, closure orders and vehicle seizures are not being applied for and used in the way that other local authorities are using them in the rest of the country. We are producing information that gives a picture of what is happening across the country and we will circulate it to all local authorities and all members. When people are armed with that knowledge, I hope that they will ask the appropriate questions at the local level.

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** As was the case with an earlier question, Karen Gillon's question relates to local authorities' implementation of national policy frameworks. How can the Executive ensure that local authorities put into effect the agreed policies of the Parliament?

**Hugh Henry:** That question is slightly different from the one that Karen Gillon raised, which asked why the police and local authorities are not using powers that have been made available to them.

In terms of the policy framework, everything that has been asked for has been done: staff have been appointed, money has been allocated and plans have been produced. With those in place, we come to a different set of questions, including why dispersal orders have not been used and why ASBOs have not been applied for. Neither the Executive nor the Parliament should dictate what happens in local communities. Local representatives should question those who are responsible at the local level and hold them to account for their actions. Local communities should do the same. It is not reasonable to suggest that we should dictate from here in Edinburgh the exact way in which the powers are used in every community in Scotland.

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** The minister might be interested to know that my colleague Annabel Goldie was told last week that only two ASBOs for the under-16s, three dispersal orders and no parenting orders have been applied for in Scotland. Will the minister explain why there has not been greater take-up of those orders in areas such as North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire—and, indeed, throughout Scotland—where there is

a clear need for them to combat youth crime? The deep suspicion in communities is that they are not being implemented because there are inadequate police to enforce them. Can the minister allay those fears?

**Hugh Henry:** I repeat that the powers are in place and the money has been provided. Local agencies must now use them. Margaret Mitchell needs to ask the police and councils in her area why those things are not happening.

We need to have a sense of perspective. The Executive did not anticipate that large numbers of ASBOs for under-16s would be made as a result of the passage of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004. Criticism was levied that the act might be used as a blunderbuss, but that was never our intention. The powers need to be used proportionately. That said, where they are not being used at all, local agencies should be asked why they are not using them.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** The minister might have read this morning about one of my unfortunate constituents who rode his mini quad bike into a police photo shoot, thereby managing to get himself arrested.

I understand that one of the problems in enforcing the regulations against users of quad bikes and mini quad bikes—at least in the Strathclyde area—is that the police have no forms that they can hand over to people. Will the minister ensure that mechanisms are in place to enable the police to enforce the regulations and that the penalties associated with the use of quad bikes, which are a great disturbance to my constituents, are adequately publicised?

**Hugh Henry:** There are a number of examples of local authorities taking positive action to encourage young people in particular to use quad bikes responsibly. In North Lanarkshire there are some good examples of facilities being made available. We encourage local authorities to do that. We will reflect on whether there are any legislative gaps, but it is for local police to ensure that appropriate procedures are in place.

### **Forth Road Bridge (Tolls)**

**6. Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Executive what impact varying tolls on the Forth road bridge would have on congestion in the Lothians. (S2O-9657)

**The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon):** The modelling work that was done for the tolled bridges review shows that varying toll levels has the potential to affect traffic flows and congestion on parts of the network, including in the Lothians.

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. There is too much noise.

**Mark Ballard:** Just before the Easter recess, Tavish Scott promised the Parliament an examination of the economic, social and environmental impacts and costs of retaining or removing tolls from the Forth road bridge. Will the minister explain why that review is to be limited to the impacts on Fife and Dundee, given that, as he said, varying the tolls would impact on the Lothians? Will the review consider the impacts on West Lothian, Midlothian and Edinburgh, as well as the impacts on Fife and Dundee?

**George Lyon:** As the member is aware, the matter has been debated many times in the Parliament. During the most recent debate, concerns were raised that maintaining tolling on the Forth and Tay bridges has a detrimental effect on the economies and local communities of Fife and Dundee. The study will consider whether there is evidence to support the concerns about the impact of removing tolls, both locally and nationally. I am sure that it will consider the impact south of the River Forth as well.

**Scott Barrie (Dunfermline West) (Lab):** Does the minister agree that the Forth road bridge is not just a local bridge for Fife and the Lothians, but is also the main arterial route for the whole of the east of Scotland? Furthermore, given the current position of the tollbooths and the fact that motorists are charged only for entering Fife, does he agree that the tolls have a disproportionate impact on the economies of Fife and beyond and that that impact is greater than the impact on the Lothians?

**George Lyon:** Given the concerns that were raised during the debate, I am sure that the study will look into all of those matters. We can only wait until the study is completed and the report is available to ministers and the Parliament.

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** What consideration has the minister given to examining whether the tollbooths themselves cause congestion in Dundee, Fife and the Lothians?

**George Lyon:** That is an interesting observation. I am not in a position to pass comment on it. I am sure that the Minister for Transport and Telecommunications set up the study to investigate such issues and that that matter will be considered.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** Is it the minister's intention that the Executive should speak with one voice on the subject?



**George Lyon:** I am sure that the member is aware that the Executive always speaks with one voice on the matter.

### Transport (Orkney)

**7. Mr Jim Wallace (Orkney) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions transport department officials have had with Orkney Islands Council, since the beginning of 2006, in relation to internal transport arrangements within Orkney. (S2O-9609)

**The Deputy Minister for Finance, Public Service Reform and Parliamentary Business (George Lyon):** Transport department officials have had a number of exchanges with council officials on the issue, most recently at a meeting in Edinburgh on Monday 6 March.

**Mr Wallace:** The minister might be aware of the correspondence earlier this year between the convener of Orkney Islands Council and the Minister for Transport and Telecommunications, in which the convener stated that the cost of the tender for the air services within Orkney had increased by 83 per cent. A significant part of that increase is attributable to the withdrawal from Loganair of the Scottish Ambulance Service contract, under which Loganair had an Islander aircraft based in Kirkwall. Does the minister accept that that is not a good example of joined-up government, given that one public authority's decision has cost another public authority more than £123,000? What does the minister propose to do about that?

**George Lyon:** I am sure that Mr Wallace makes an interesting point. Following the representations that he made to the previous Minister for Transport, a meeting was held in February 2005 between Orkney Islands Council and the minister, which Mr Wallace also attended. Ministers agreed to work with the council to consider its future internal transport investment needs and officials are participating in a working group that the council has established for that purpose. I am sure that the points that Mr Wallace makes will be taken into consideration as part of those discussions.

**The Presiding Officer:** I will allow a slight pause for members to take their seats.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**1. Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Scottish Executive's Cabinet. (S2F-2245)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** The Cabinet will discuss issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Does the First Minister appreciate how angry and concerned people were when they learned yesterday that more than 1,000 convicted foreign criminals, including murderers and sex offenders, had been released on to our streets when they should have been deported? I appreciate that it is not a mess of the Scottish Executive's making, but the First Minister is responsible for public safety in Scotland. I understand that no information is available yet on the number of such prisoners who were released from Scottish prisons but—this is more important—does the First Minister have any idea how many of those 1,000 individuals now live in Scotland? What efforts are the Scottish authorities making to help to track them down?

**The First Minister:** Ms Sturgeon will be aware that the Home Office does not release the details of individual cases, which creates a complication in clarifying the matter for the public. Of course I share any public concern about the situation, even if it affects only England and Wales, although it may affect the whole of the United Kingdom.

It is important to state on the record the figures for Scotland in the past year. In Scottish jails, 188 individuals who reached the end of their custodial sentences were identified as foreign nationals. Of those, 26 were released into the custody of the immigration and nationality directorate for deportation, as has been identified by the directorate. The procedure that we follow is different from that for prisons in England. The procedure that has been agreed between the IND, the Home Office and the Scottish Prison Service is that when an individual has been identified for deportation, the Home Office—through the IND— informs the Scottish Prison Service about that individual and the SPS releases that person into the IND's custody.

There is not yet evidence to suggest that any individuals were wrongly released within that general procedure, but it is important to clarify the position. That is why the Scottish Prison Service is urgently seeking clarification from the Home Office so that it can identify whether any individual in the

total of just over 1,000 for which the Home Office is responsible has any connection with a Scottish prison.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I thank the First Minister for his full answer

Does the First Minister appreciate that, notwithstanding whether any such individuals were released from Scottish prisons, any number of the 1,000 who were released throughout the United Kingdom could now be resident in Scotland? *[Interruption.]* This is a serious matter. Does he agree that, as soon as it was known that prisoners had been wrongly released, every police force in the UK—including Scottish police forces—should have been alerted so that efforts could be made to trace the individuals? We know that the Home Office has been aware of the fiasco for the best part of the past year, but has been incapable of getting it under control. When did the Home Office tell the Scottish Executive about the problem and when were Scottish police forces given a list of people for whom they should be on the lookout?

**The First Minister:** Given the difficulties that appear to have arisen in the Home Office in recent days, I suspect that it still could not identify some individuals in the list to Scottish police forces or to police forces in England or Wales.

It is important that the Scottish police forces not only stand ready to assist the Home Office in identifying or dealing with individuals, but that they should already be doing so if they have identified in discussions someone who needs to be tracked in Scotland or picked up for deportation. That is the right procedure. It would not be right for ministers here or down south to become involved in the details of discussions on individual cases between the police forces and the IND, but it is important that we ensure that Scottish police forces, which are within our responsibility, co-operate fully with the Home Office. That is precisely what we have done in conversations that have taken place this morning.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I asked the First Minister when the Scottish Executive was informed of the problem because I understand that the Executive had no knowledge of it until yesterday, which is absolutely incredible. Does the First Minister agree that it is completely unacceptable that the Scottish Government was not alerted immediately of an ongoing blunder that has serious implications for public safety in Scotland as well as in the rest of the United Kingdom? Will he join me in telling the Home Office to get its act together and to start to show more concern for the interests of the public in Scotland and the rest of the UK?

**The First Minister:** I am as disappointed as many members are, and probably angrier than they are, about the public safety issues. However,

we must see the responsibility that we have for public safety in Scotland in the wider context in which we operate. The Scottish Prison Service and the Scottish police forces not only need to deal with the issues—they need to get clearer answers from the Home Office to assist them in dealing with those issues.

We in Scotland should be concerned that the problem is happening south of the border, where many Scots regularly travel. I hope that Ms Sturgeon accepts that, and I hope that she is not suggesting that we should be parochial. We can be part of the solution for the whole United Kingdom. In exercising our responsibilities, we must ensure that our agencies can conduct themselves in a way that assists the Home Office in dealing with its difficulties and which also protects the safety of members of the public in Scotland.

I am not yet satisfied that the Scottish Prison Service and the Scottish police forces have all the information they require to ascertain whether they are in such a position. There is no evidence to suggest that anyone has been wrongly released from a Scottish prison when they should have been deported or that any of the people in question is lost in Scotland, but there has been no absolute clarification about that. Therefore, we expect the Home Office to clarify for the Scottish Prison Service and the police forces in Scotland as soon as possible any involvement that they must have.

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I am glad that the First Minister accepts his responsibility for public safety. Does he agree that his having that responsibility is the reason why the Home Office should have alerted the Scottish Executive to the problem long before yesterday? Does he agree that the Home Office is clearly a Government department in chaos, and that that has clear implications for Scotland? Perhaps he will agree that if Westminster is incapable of running an efficient and effective immigration system—as seems to be the case—it is time for the Scottish Parliament to take responsibility for running such a system.

**The First Minister:** I have said what I am about to say before and will say it again. There are two types of response when such situations arise: first, there is the responsible response, which involves using the responsibilities that we have, ensuring that the agencies that operate on our behalf are acting properly, and making it clear to people who have responsibilities that if they are letting us down, they need to sharpen up and ensure that all the information is available that will allow us to do all that. The alternative response is to try to turn every public policy difficulty, public service delivery difficulty or crime and safety difficulty into a constitutional argument to justify the ludicrous

position that Ms Sturgeon adopts on separating Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom. I think that would be the wrong response on this occasion. This is not a matter for political or constitutional debate; it is a matter of public safety and should be treated as such. Therefore, everyone should take it more seriously.

### **Prime Minister (Meetings)**

**2. Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister and what issues they will discuss. (S2F-2246)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I have no immediate plans to meet the Prime Minister.

**Miss Goldie:** The First Minister will no doubt have been as horrified as I was to learn that Callum Evans, who was convicted yesterday in Glasgow of the most gruesome murder of John Hatfield, had been under a restriction of liberty order for previous serious offences at the time of the attack. We have heard that the First Minister and the Home Office cannot tell us how many foreign criminals who should have been deported are now at large in Scotland, but can he tell us how many other tagged individuals, like Mr Evans, have in the past year gone on to commit offences while under a restriction of liberty order?

**The First Minister:** I am sure that I have in recent days seen the figures for the number of people on restriction of liberty orders. I do not have them in front of me, but I will happily make them available to Annabel Goldie.

In respect of the particularly tragic case that she mentioned, I want to express—I am sure on behalf of all members in the chamber—our sympathy to the family of John Hatfield, and our congratulations to the police officers who were responsible for the capture of the person who has now been convicted and to the courts for convicting him so quickly.

It is important that the people who are responsible for electronic tagging ensure that all their staff are properly trained to use the system effectively and that any lessons that require to be learned by the new contractor—Serco Limited—from the mistake that seems to have been made in this case by one individual in tagging a person are learned and are implemented as part of the new contract.

**Miss Goldie:** As the public sees it, the Executive appears to be guilty of using community sentences such as tagging as a way to empty our prisons and at the same time to place the public at risk. Disturbingly, the “Criminal Proceedings in Scottish Courts” 2004-05 bulletin, which was published this morning, shows that a number of

individuals who had been found guilty of serious crimes were released back on to our streets. For example, in the category of serious assault and attempted murder, 24 people were, as their main penalty, tagged, 213 were given community service orders and 169 were fined. I have to say that it is no wonder public confidence in the criminal justice system is in pieces. While the criminals gloat, the public is aghast. When so many dangerous individuals never go to jail, how can the Executive even begin to protect the law-abiding majority in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** It is important to reiterate that sentences that are imposed in our courts are matters for the courts and that such judgments are made by qualified judges and sheriffs. However, we also expect those courts to ensure that anyone who is dangerous and who has been convicted of a dangerous crime in particular is, in fact, locked away in order to protect the public. However, the court has a duty to make a judgment in each individual case about the sentence that is imposed.

I think there are facts in this matter that counter Annabel Goldie's accusations. First, our prison population is higher than it has ever been, so to suggest that we are in some way emptying prisons to cut costs, or that we are changing the nature of sentencing for that purpose alone, is very wrong. More people today are being locked up—I suspect for longer—in Scotland than was previously the case.

We are also changing the nature of sentencing to ensure that people who would have been on short-term sentences—particularly younger people, who in custodial sentences would simply have access to more serious criminals and would be more likely, as all the evidence shows, to lead a whole life of crime—are getting tougher sentences in the community that force them to address their offending and make them less likely to reoffend in the longer term. That is exactly the right policy. The combination of the two sentencing approaches shows, of course, that the number of convictions in Scotland is significantly higher today than it has been over recent years and that those sentences are, I think, more effective as a result.

**Miss Goldie:** Prison capacity may be an issue for another day, but I say to the First Minister that we already know that a number of foreign criminals are on our streets in Scotland, and we now learn that some of Scotland's most serious offenders are released back on to our streets without ever going to jail. Can the First Minister tell us how many foreign nationals who have been found guilty of serious assault and attempted murder, or of non-sexual crimes of violence, were not sent to jail and were therefore never even considered for deportation?

**The First Minister:** I think Annabel Goldie misunderstands the system. Deportations are not decided by the Scottish Prison Service or by Scottish courts; they are decided by the Home Office under the appropriate procedures. It is possible for a Scottish court to recommend consideration of deportation alongside another sentence, but it would ultimately be for the Home Office to determine whether a person should be deported—either as an alternative to a custodial sentence or at the end of a custodial sentence. In such cases we would ensure that the Scottish Prison Service worked with the Home Office to implement the decision. My understanding is that the SPS has done that. It is checking with the Home Office the figures for individual cases to ensure that that has always been the case.

I do not accept Annabel Goldie's assertion that there has been a change in sentencing policy that is leading to more dangerous people being out on the streets and not taken into custody. Our prison population is at a record high. The clear-up rate for crimes in Scotland is at virtually its highest-ever level, the number of crimes that are committed in Scotland is going down and the conviction rate is increasing, especially for knife crimes, for which I believe the conviction rate is up by 20 per cent. Knife crime was identified by this Parliament and this devolved Government as a priority. When the police and the courts—and indeed the Prison Service—are having those successes, they should be supported in going even further.

### **National Health Service (Targets)**

**3. Dr Jean Turner (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind):** To ask the First Minister what evidence the Scottish Executive requires in order to remove an NHS target in the interests of patient care. (S2F-2254)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** We work to implement our targets in the health service. We also regularly review those targets, and this maintains their relevance to our overall aim of improving patient care.

**Dr Turner:** Does the First Minister not consider that many of the targets that are set by the Executive demoralise staff because they are too often unrealistic and therefore unachievable? In order to keep their jobs, staff focus their energies on the target at the expense of the patient. Realistically, how does the First Minister think the national health service can achieve many of the Executive's targets when the Executive is continually reducing the number of beds and hospitals all over Scotland?

**The First Minister:** I do not think that the answer to all of this is simply beds. The answer is about the number of treatments and the way in which patients are cared for. Increasingly, the

answer should be about the prevention of ill health as well as about the treatment of people who suffer from ill health. The answer lies in the combination of the right strategy and policies with investment and the targets.

I remind Dr Turner that, although meeting a target can be challenging for a member of staff—in whatever sector, be it public, private or voluntary—achievement of a target can be a fulfilling experience for a member of staff in any service. I am certain that health service staff across Scotland felt a considerable sense of achievement from the fact that they managed to reach the target, at the end of last year, of no one waiting longer than six months for either in-patient treatment or out-patient consultation; for the fact that deaths from heart disease, stroke and cancer in Scotland are down; and for the fact that, across the piece, the performance of the Scottish health service has been improving and is improving. We should be proud of that and proud of the staff for those achievements.

**Dr Turner:** I am sure that the First Minister answered my question in good faith. I expect that he will accept that what I have to say is also said in good faith. How can the NHS meet many of the Scottish Executive's targets without an increase in the number of in-patient beds? Will the Scottish Executive listen to front-line staff and the public? When staff are under stress, patients may suffer.

**The First Minister:** One of the advantages that we have in our health service in Scotland with our devolved Government is the opportunity to get closer to health service staff and professionals and to discuss with them the strategy, the policies and the targets that we have set out.

I believe that one of the reasons why we are making such significant progress in the health service in Scotland—which includes reductions in waiting times, reductions in deaths from Scotland's killer diseases and improved procedures and arrangements in almost every aspect of our health service—is that we listen to health service staff and professionals and work with them to achieve progress. Instead of working against the grain of the professional expertise of those workers, we ensure that they come with us, not just so that they obtain fulfilment from achieving our targets, but so that we have the right targets in the first place.

### **HM Treasury**

**4. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what input HM Treasury has to the spending commitments of the Scottish Executive. (S2F-2249)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** HM Treasury calculates the size of the Scottish block

through its spending review process, but it is then for Scottish ministers to decide on the use and allocation of those resources, subject to the agreement of the Scottish Parliament, to meet Scotland's needs and priorities.

**Jackie Baillie:** Does the First Minister acknowledge that the increase in the Scottish budget from £15 billion in 1999 to £25 billion last year represents a massive 61 per cent cash increase, which is the highest percentage growth in our post-war history? That has been delivered by a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer for spending on Scottish priorities. Does the First Minister agree that there is no substance to the story that the Treasury will determine how we spend our money and that it is just so much froth from the overworked and fevered imaginations of members of the Opposition?

**The First Minister:** I could not agree more.

**Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):** Here comes the froth.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** I assure Mr Morrison that there is no fever among members of the Scottish National Party today.

In response to questions from Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister has already made it clear that he is deeply concerned about the disarray in the Home Office; he is quite right to be so concerned. Is he not equally concerned about the disarray in HM Treasury, which on Sunday told a newspaper that it was going to exercise control over how the Scottish Executive makes spending decisions, but on Monday did a flip-flop and changed its position?

Will the First Minister confirm to Parliament that the Treasury exerts no influence over the timing of spending decisions? If the Treasury exerts such influence, does the First Minister accept that that represents a constraint on Parliament's ability to decide when it spends taxpayers' money in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** I can confirm that although we discuss the timing of individual payments to ensure that our expenditure and the Treasury's overall financial management are not out of kilter, the Treasury does not influence the timing of projects or expenditure in Scotland. Decisions on the phasing of expenditure and the timing of the commencement of projects are made by the Executive—the devolved Government. It is right and proper that that should be the case. Given that John Swinney has had four days to try to rethink his question in the light of the statement that the Treasury made on Monday—I am sure that he was disappointed that the Treasury clarified that it does not exercise control over our spending—I think that he might have thought up a better one.

## **Union of the Parliaments (300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary)**

**5. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what plans the Scottish Executive has to commemorate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1707 union of the Parliaments. (S2F-2247)

**Members:** Hear, hear.

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** I hope that official reporters managed to catch Nicola Sturgeon's "Hear, hear." We are all looking forward to that.

Discussions are taking place with a range of organisations about what might be done to recognise the tricentenary of the Act of Union of 1707. The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport will outline our plans before the summer recess.

**Murdo Fraser:** I thank the First Minister for that positive response; there seems to be an outbreak of cross-party consensus on the issue.

I am sure that the First Minister will agree that, whatever one's political persuasion, the union of the Parliaments was a significant event in Scotland's history. Whether or not one takes the view, as I do, that the union has benefited Scotland, I hope that we all agree that the anniversary is important and should be commemorated. I hope that the Scottish Executive will work closely with Her Majesty's Government to put in place a programme of events that will bring the nation together in celebration of the union of the Parliaments.

**The First Minister:** Murdo Fraser making a contribution that attracted cross-party consensus in Parliament might be an even more remarkable event.

It is important that we recognise the anniversary and discuss our arrangements for that recognition with the United Kingdom Government. It is also important that the UK Government recognises that the anniversary will be not just a Scottish but a UK anniversary. We should use people in Scotland who have an interest in the matter to help us to prepare in the best possible way. Yesterday, I discussed with Professor Tom Devine the input that he and his colleagues might provide. I want to ensure that people in Scotland who have ideas to suggest and contributions to make take part in our discussions.

I hope that we can develop consensus in the Parliament on how we will take the matter forward. In 2006 and 2007, people in Scotland should be able to celebrate, commemorate or at least consider and recognise the historic events of our country's past without always regarding them as a political divide. It is important that today's youngsters learn about what happened in the past, so that our country can move forward.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I agree with the First Minister that children should be told about the past—and the future. Does the First Minister agree that the best way of commemorating the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the union of the Parliaments would be to end the union of the Parliaments and to repatriate Scotland's wealth to the Scottish people?

**The First Minister:** This week, record figures for growth in orders for Scottish manufacturing were published and figures confirmed the doubling of the number of graduates in the Scottish labour market. Yesterday, it was announced that Scotland's economic growth, after several years of lagging behind that of the United Kingdom, is now on a par with the UK, and we are determined to drive growth even higher. This morning, the second-highest year-on-year increase in Scotland's population was announced. At a time when all those figures are moving in the right direction and Scotland's economy is stronger than it has been for a long time, the last thing we should do is take the advice of Alex Neil and the Scottish National Party and separate Scotland's economy from that of the rest of the UK.

**The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** I call John Home Robertson.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** The parcel of rogues.

**John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab):** If we are going to delve into ancient history, the First Minister might like to consider the motion that I lodged this week about the role of my predecessors Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun and Patrick Home in 1707. Some members of that parcel of rogues were

"Bought and sold for English gold"

—perhaps including one of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton's forebears—but some were not.

Does the First Minister agree that the only flaw in a union that brought much prosperity and success to Scotland was the abolition of Scotland's Parliament, which was finally corrected when our Labour Government passed the Scotland Act 1998 and created this Parliament? Now that we have a democratic Scottish Parliament, what is the point of having a nationalist party? Surely the Scottish National Party should be declared redundant.

**The First Minister:** Normally I do all that I can to oppose redundancies and help Scots to find jobs, but Mr Home Robertson has perhaps identified an exception.

### Private Water Supplies

**6. Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what assistance

will be available to small businesses that have to upgrade their private water supplies as a result of new regulations governing such supplies. (S2F-2260)

**The First Minister (Mr Jack McConnell):** Rhona Brankin recently announced a non-means-tested grant scheme, which will assist appropriate individuals and businesses to invest in new equipment to improve their private water supplies.

**Alasdair Morgan:** The Scottish Executive estimates that the costs could exceed £10,000, with the average being £1,150, but the grant cannot exceed £800. Will the First Minister undertake now to review the level of assistance if it turns out that the Executive's estimates are too low, as many small businesses believe?

**The First Minister:** The budget for the grant scheme is £8 million in each of the next two years. That is a substantial contribution to what is primarily a private cost, but we are committed to making it and it is important that we do so, given the regulations that are coming into force. We hope that people throughout Scotland will ensure maximum take-up of the new grant scheme.

12:30

*Meeting suspended until 14:15.*

14:15

*On resuming—*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Environment and Rural Development

##### Household Waste

##### 1. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has published guidelines on the maximum length of time between collections of perishable household waste. (S2O-9600)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** We have not published guidelines on the issue. However, some of our strategic waste fund awards to local authorities have supported fortnightly collections of residual waste, which might include perishable waste, to allow for separate kerbside collections of recyclable material.

**Margaret Mitchell:** Is the minister aware that because of the recent local government strike, East Ayrshire Council and East Dunbartonshire Council refused to collect perishable waste for a staggering four weeks instead of collecting it fortnightly, which many people already consider too long for health and hygiene reasons? Will the minister meet the leaders of the local authorities that have acted in that irresponsible manner in an effort to ensure that they adopt a more commonsense approach to refuse collection in future? That would address the justifiable hygiene concerns of parents of babies or young children and the most vulnerable in society, including the elderly.

**Ross Finnie:** I am always happy to meet authorities if doing so can produce a more sensible arrangement. However, we are conflating two not necessarily related issues. The move towards fortnightly collections seems broadly justifiable on the ground that if we are encouraging householders to separate their domestic waste and place up to 50 per cent of it in a recycling or composting bin, thereby leaving a much smaller amount of residual waste, the need for weekly collections will reduce. However, if there has been a specific problem in which a collection period has lasted longer than that, I or my department will be happy to enter into discussions to resolve it.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** Will the minister confirm that as part of East Dunbartonshire Council's bid for money from the strategic waste fund, the condition was set that

stakeholders would be consulted before there was a move from weekly to fortnightly collection? However, the Liberal Democrat-run authority appears to be introducing fortnightly collection without consulting the people of East Dunbartonshire. Will the minister take action to deal with that situation? The authority claims that the trigger for its move is a budget reduction of £95,000 that it is expected to make. However, that can be achieved only by breaking contracts, which it is not in a position to do.

**Ross Finnie:** There are several issues there. I express my shock and horror in words and by visual expression that any Liberal Democrat administration could possibly not consult its residents. However, we are dealing with a matter of principle and we should be careful about the changes that are required if we are to achieve a satisfactory level of recycling. We do not want to impinge on the need for prior consultation, but there is a genuine need to change the way in which we collect waste and to encourage the ordinary citizen to separate out that waste. If we do that, we will reduce hugely the volume in the residual waste bin. We should not confuse the understandable concern about lack of prior consultation with the sensible and pragmatic arrangement that now exists in many authorities in Scotland to make fortnightly collections from a range of bins.

On whether such a scheme impinges on the budget, I confirm that East Dunbartonshire, like all other authorities, will have received allocations from the strategic waste fund to enable it to provide adequate kerbside collection in its local area.

##### Poultry and Egg Products

**2. Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has for discussions with supermarkets and other major retailers in respect of the sales of poultry and egg products. (S2O-9614)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** The Scottish Executive has regular discussions with retailers on a wide range of issues. The Scottish Retail Consortium has been represented at stakeholder meetings set up in response to the discovery of H5N1 high pathogenic avian influenza in Scotland and has played a constructive role in discussions with the Executive and other stakeholders.

**Euan Robson:** Does the minister agree that it is high time that supermarkets made a genuine effort to support local primary producers during market fluctuations, particularly by sharing additional costs instead of simply passing them on? Furthermore, will he comment on recent

statements that appeared to cast doubt on the quality of Scottish food?

**Ross Finnie:** I assume that the member's latter question refers to certain very unfortunate statements made by the Waitrose organisation that might have suggested that it was safe to purchase products from its stores because it did not source anything from Scotland. I should say for the Parliament's benefit that Waitrose has recognised that the statement was loosely worded and has publicly apologised for it. It has also apologised to the president of the National Farmers Union Scotland and my own office for any offence that it might have given.

In that spirit, I should also tell the chamber that, when I met the chairman of Tesco privately last Friday, I pointed out that if general market conditions that are dictated by exceptional events such as an outbreak of avian influenza are depressing world market prices, supermarkets should have regard to our local suppliers' absolute need to survive by not exacerbating such difficult situations through their trading terms and conditions.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** On the minister's point about the responsibility on supermarkets not to depress the market in this country during, for example, an outbreak of avian influenza, does he share my concern at the news that a number of supermarkets purchased poultry products from European countries with a greater incidence of avian influenza simply because the price was low and, by doing so, displaced products from suppliers in our country? Will the minister pursue that concern with certain supermarkets to ensure that they protect the long-term viability of domestic markets instead of trying to make a quick buck out of a difficult situation?

**Ross Finnie:** I largely agree with Mr Swinney. Indeed, I have pursued—and am pursuing—that very issue with the Scottish Retail Consortium and two supermarkets. Since the outbreak of avian influenza in the far east, there has been a very substantial reduction in the consumption of these products. For example, in Italy, there has been a 20 or 30 per cent reduction, although worldwide the reduction has been about 8 to 12 per cent. Of course, such a natural economic fluctuation has led to a worldwide price reduction of roughly the same amount. As I have already told a number of organisations, it is in no one's long-term interest for any organisation in this country to exploit such a position, and I plan to pursue the matter through the Scottish Retail Consortium.

### **Scottish Water (Water Quality)**

**3. Susan Deacon (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps are being taken by Scottish

Water to further improve water quality in Scotland in the next four years. (S2O-9625)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin):** Scottish Water is currently preparing a revised delivery plan for 2006 to 2010, which will outline how it plans to deliver the Executive's objectives within the funds set by the Water Industry Commission for Scotland and will be submitted to ministers for approval. Overseeing the production of a robust delivery plan that commands the support of Scottish Water's regulators is one of the early tasks that ministers have asked Scottish Water's new interim chair, Ronnie Mercer, to undertake.

**Susan Deacon:** I thank the minister for her answer and I take the opportunity to welcome Scottish Water's announcement this week of a £100 million investment programme for Edinburgh's public water supply to replace what is, in some cases, Victorian infrastructure.

Does the minister agree that local and national decision-making processes must be effective and ensure that vital infrastructure development projects move forward quickly and effectively? In that vein, with regard to Scottish Water's investment programme, can she give an assurance that, in future, the detail of delivery plans, the requirements of the regulatory process and other administrative requirements and arrangements will be completed in advance of the beginning of the regulatory period, so that that investment programme can begin delivering benefits to people across Scotland at the earliest possible date?

**Rhona Brankin:** Clearly, we must be able to ensure that no development is held back. Ministers have given a categorical assurance—indeed, it is a key ministerial objective—that there should be funding to deliver capacity for infrastructure. We need to ensure that there are no development constraints and that plans are made in good time. Scottish Water should have been having discussions with all local authorities about the potential for development. I hope that the City of Edinburgh Council will be able to take forward developments as soon as possible.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** In response to the recent events surrounding Scottish Water, does the Scottish Executive plan to review the quality and standards III process in advance of the second phase of quality and standards III in 2010, to ensure that the events of the past few months are not repeated in future?

**Rhona Brankin:** We have no plans to review that, but we must be able to ensure that we can quickly take forward a revised delivery plan. We have a lot to do. We have to deliver the largest ever investment programme in the United



Kingdom water industry, which will improve drinking water quality for customers, create a cleaner water environment and address development constraints. It will also improve customer service and, as Susan Deacon has pointed out in the past, improve odour problems caused by waste water—I understand that she has had concern in the past about Seafield. At the same time, charges over the next four years are expected to rise by less than the rate of inflation. There is now a new interim chair and I am sure that Scottish Water will rise to the new set of challenges that it faces.

#### **Firth of Forth (Oil)**

**4. Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has responded to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's public consultation on the revised oil spill contingency plan and the environmental impact of ship-to-ship oil transfers in the Firth of Forth. (S2O-9654)

**The Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Rhona Brankin):** The Scottish Executive is still considering its response to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's consultation, which does not close until 11 May. A copy of the eventual reply will be placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre.

**Tricia Marwick:** I thank the minister for her answer and for agreeing to meet me and other MSPs representing Fife and the Lothians who have raised the matter with her in past months. Does she accept that, under article 6(4) of the European Union habitats directive and regulation 49 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations 1994, if a project is likely to have an adverse impact on a European wildlife site, it may be consented to only if there is no alternative and there are

"imperative reasons of overriding public interest"?

Does she accept that she has a duty in that regard under the habitats directive and will she make that clear in the response to the consultation document?

**Rhona Brankin:** Although I do not have a direct role in the assessment of the proposal, or indeed a power of veto, I have a responsibility, as Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development, to understand whether the proposed operation poses a significant threat to the environment, to understand the nature and scale of any such threat and to ensure that appropriate action is taken to deal with such a threat. As I have said previously, Scottish Natural Heritage will provide ministers with advice on the natural heritage implications of the application in advance of its own response to the MCA consultation. I am

aware of the European Court of Justice's 20 October 2005 ruling on the UK's transposition of the habitats directive and I am conscious of our role under that directive. However, I tell Tricia Marwick and other members who have expressed concern about the proposal that we have had a debate on the matter and that I am well aware of the depth of feeling about the proposal. I have agreed to meet members and I assure them that, when I receive the advice from Scottish Natural Heritage, I will consider it closely, as I treat the matter seriously.

#### **Coastal and Marine National Parks**

**5. Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what account will be taken of community concerns regarding the designation of any coastal and marine national park. (S2O-9645)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** On Tuesday 18 April, I announced plans to launch an Executive consultation on proposals for a coastal and marine national park in early summer. I have asked Scottish Natural Heritage to continue to engage with local communities ahead of the consultation to explain and discuss the proposals. I assure Alasdair Morrison that we will listen to all views and will take them into account before any decision about the designation of a park is made.

**Mr Morrison:** I am grateful to the minister for that clear and unambiguous response. Does he agree with me, the Western Isles Fishermen's Association, the convener of Western Isles Council and the chair of the sustainable development committee of the council, Archie Campbell, that it is imperative that we allow the regional fisheries management committee that the minister recently helped to establish a period of at least three to four years' operation before any decision is made on the inclusion of the Western Isles in the proposed marine national park? Given the articulation of concerns about duplication and other matters, will he help us to ensure that all areas that relate to the Western Isles are withdrawn from the proposed marine national park?

**Ross Finnie:** I would be reluctant to go as far as that. We must bear some responsibility for the great degree of confusion that has arisen between the purpose and effect of a marine and coastal national park and the purpose and effect of, for example, a marine protected area. The designation of a marine protected area clearly places new and different conservation obligations on an area. The idea of a marine and coastal national park is to put together an area in Scotland that exhibits some of the best qualities of our natural heritage and try to improve the way in

which we manage that, but it is not intended to stop economic activity. There is no proposal that would necessarily interfere with the inshore fisheries group continuing to operate within the ambit of a marine national park. It is the same as with the terrestrial parks, where we do not stop every farmer farming; we continue to permit economic activity, but we put it in the framework of presenting an area of outstanding excellence in conservation and public access domestically and internationally.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):** Questions 6 and 7 have been withdrawn.

### **Buildings (Energy Performance)**

**8. Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Executive what assessment the Environment and Rural Affairs Department has made of the environmental impact of European directive 2002/91/EC. (S2O-9617)

**The Minister for Environment and Rural Development (Ross Finnie):** No environmental impact assessment has been carried out. Promoting improvement of the energy performance of buildings is wholly consistent with environmental issues. Responsibility for the implementation of the European Union directive on the energy performance of buildings, to which Margo MacDonald refers, lies with the Scottish Building Standards Agency. The agency has implemented a large part of the directive but is seeking derogation, as allowed under the directive, on certain articles in line with the rest of the United Kingdom. It is intended that consultation documentation on those remaining articles will be available on the SBSA's website from May.

**Margo MacDonald:** Is the minister satisfied that, after three years' notice of the directive, we are still only at the consultation stage? Why is it that the Executive, having put so much energy into promoting energy saving, is failing to take the advantage that the Parliament has of displaying a certificate of energy efficiency? That would lead the way and perhaps show that the Parliament is fulfilling the European directive's intention of making a 25 per cent energy saving.

**Ross Finnie:** I am certainly not satisfied that we are necessarily implementing the directive's provisions on energy saving as swiftly as they might be implemented, although, for the reasons that I have given, the Scottish Building Standards Agency has implemented a substantial amount of the directive.

I would certainly be happy to consider further whether the Parliament building complies and whether we could display such a certificate. If that is the case, I would be happy to take it up.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move on to questions on health and community care.

**Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. We have not had our appointed 20 minutes yet. The clock says only 14:34:40 and we usually move on at 14:35.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes but, in my judgment, it will be impossible to deal with the next question in the first theme in 20 seconds and I am therefore proceeding to the second theme.

## **Health and Community Care**

### **Beaulieu to Denny Transmission Line**

**1. Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what input the Minister for Health and Community Care has had to Cabinet discussions about the health implications of the proposed Beaulieu to Denny transmission line. (S2O-9604)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** Cabinet regularly discusses issues related to health. However, Scottish ministers operate on the basis of collective responsibility and do not disclose details of private deliberations.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** That is a rather disappointing response. New concerns are being expressed about the health implications of overhead power lines, which were made public only yesterday and of which I hope the minister is aware, and the likely recommendation of the stakeholder advisory group on extremely low frequency electric and magnetic fields, which advises the United Kingdom Government, is that planning guidelines be changed to ensure that domestic residences are not built within 230ft of power lines or in locations where inhabitants would be exposed to certain strengths of electromagnetic fields—I hope that the equivalent position would apply when a new line is being proposed. In light of those developments, will the Minister for Health and Community Care now make clear his own position on the proposed Beaulieu to Denny power line, particularly in connection with its route and the possible health implications for nearby communities, especially where there are children?

**Mr Kerr:** My first answer related to the fact that we do not discuss in public matters that go on at Cabinet. However, I can advise the member that I am of course aware of recent reports on the subject. The scientific community remains uncertain about the issue, so it has of course recommended that the precautionary principle should apply. Under the planning process, any concerns that are raised with Scottish ministers in environmental impact assessments and in

responses from statutory consultees or any other bodies or individuals will be fully considered. That allows us to take in recent reports as part of our consideration.

Dr Michael Clark, spokesperson for the Health Protection Agency, said:

"There is no hard evidence of a risk but there is a hint of one in work done abroad and in a study here of a weak association between childhood leukaemia and living near power lines."

We have to balance the scientific advice, always taking cognisance of it and, above all, always ensuring the safety of communities here in Scotland.

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Given the scientific uncertainty, would the Executive be prepared to release information about the position that the Scottish Executive has been taking with respect to SAGE, on which it has a representative? In particular, has work been done in Scotland by the Executive's representative to examine precautionary distances between power lines and housing that apply in other countries?

**Mr Kerr:** The Executive officer who participates in SAGE reports back to us regularly. We should ensure that we take the findings of any study in the round. Research has found a statistical association but has not established a causal link. Other scientists remain unconvinced. We are constantly aware of the work of the National Radiological Protection Board and other organisations that give us advice on these matters, and our decisions will always be taken in the best interests of the health of the people of Scotland.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Does the minister consider it acceptable that Scottish and Southern Energy has not given any consideration to health issues when considering the route of the proposed new power line? Given that there is, at best, a reasonable doubt about the impact of electricity lines on health, should that not be a material factor in the determination of the application?

**Mr Kerr:** As I have said previously, we will consider all aspects of the matter as and when Scottish ministers have to make their judgments. In responding to members' questions, I am simply trying to find a balance in relation to the scientific findings. No definite causal association between childhood leukaemia and exposure to EMFs and power lines has been made. There are differences of opinion. The job of the Scottish Executive is to examine all the available current research and to take its decision based on that. I repeat that this is about adopting a precautionary principle, ensuring that we do not endanger Scotland's population.

## Breastfeeding

**2. Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how it is promoting breastfeeding to new mothers. (S2O-9650)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** The Scottish Executive is committed to giving Scottish babies the best possible start in life. The Executive works with stakeholders, including breastfeeding co-ordinators in each of the 14 national health service board areas, to promote breastfeeding. The Executive also works with NHS Health Scotland, which supports a range of promotional, research and best practice activity at a national level. The Executive continues to progress a range of innovative policy and legislative approaches to encouraging breastfeeding.

**Cathy Peattie:** I welcome all of that, but does the minister agree that low breastfeeding rates are often linked with deprivation and poverty, and that women opt to leave hospital very quickly, sometimes just hours after they have had their baby, before there is an opportunity to establish breastfeeding? Does he agree that there is a need for more work to be done in hospitals and in aftercare to ensure that mothers who start to breastfeed their babies are supported to continue doing so?

**Mr Kerr:** I absolutely share Cathy Peattie's concern and point of view. Although Scottish breastfeeding rates have increased steadily, they have not increased fast enough, although Scotland was the first nation in the United Kingdom to set a breastfeeding target, which is reassuring.

I have visited many hospitals in Scotland and have found that 58 per cent of Scottish babies are now born in hospitals that are accredited under the Unicef UK baby-friendly initiative. We are offering a supportive environment. We are also offering our political support to mothers and workers in our national health service and the wider community, including volunteers who support mothers who breastfeed. We are trying to do our best.

Cathy Peattie's question reflects what is at the heart of our Executive strategy, which is to focus our resources on the communities that are most in need in tackling health inequalities. By supporting mothers in such communities, we will provide a better environment for our children and young people to grow up in.

I support the view that Cathy Peattie expressed. I recommend the initiatives that we have announced recently and the consultations that we are going through. We are working with breastfeeding mothers and support workers in the community to develop our policy in the best way. Cathy Peattie's essential point is accurate.

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** Will the minister take this opportunity to provide the Executive's response to the revised World Health Organisation charts on ideal birth weights for breastfed babies, bearing in mind that the historic overestimate can lead to unnecessary supplements of formula milk for breastfed babies, which can lead to later obesity and might cause some mothers to stop breastfeeding because of worries about low birth weights? Will he also reassure us that he will prioritise replacing the current charts in child development books at the earliest opportunity?

**Mr Kerr:** We are considering those matters and will respond to the member in due course. We need constantly to update our information with regard to advice to mothers. We need to understand that mothers who cannot breastfeed, or who find breastfeeding extremely difficult, also need support in relation to how best to bottle feed babies. The Executive has an absolute drive to support breastfeeding, but mothers who bottle feed also need advice and support, as the member indicated.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** The minister will be aware that the legislative protection provided by the Breastfeeding etc (Scotland) Act 2005 is currently being promoted at antenatal level by the health service. Does he agree that there are benefits to be gained from promoting awareness of the new legislation among the wider population? Does he further agree that the failure to integrate the message into the national campaign for breastfeeding awareness week last year was a missed opportunity? Will he take action to ensure that the opportunity is exploited fully this year?

**Mr Kerr:** I want to exploit such possibilities fully. Our infant feeding strategy, which we are currently discussing with mothers, the community and health care workers, will be part of that process. I return to the essential point. This Executive and NHS Scotland are doing their utmost to support mothers in our community. The initiatives in which staff are involved are extremely successful, albeit that they are run in a challenging environment. We also want to reflect our support for volunteers who assist breastfeeding mothers. I will look to ensure that we exploit every opportunity to promote the strategy adequately.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 3 has been withdrawn.

### Delivering for Health

**4. Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made on the implementation of the delivering for health agenda. (S2O-9631)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** Guidance on the implementation of delivering for health was issued to NHS boards in the form of a Health Department letter on 28 February 2006. That guidance describes what needs to be done, by whom and by when. It defines the responsibilities for the tasks contained in delivering for health and describes how NHS board accountability arrangements will be used to maintain momentum. NHS boards and regional planning groups have already started work on the recommendations that have been earmarked for them. A project team has been established within the Health Department and a delivering for health implementation board is being formed to oversee progress. NHS board annual reviews will also be used to ensure that boards are meeting their obligations.

**Janis Hughes:** I am heartened to hear that such progress is being made. I am sure that the minister will agree that it is crucial that we work to deliver the highest quality accident and emergency services in the national health service. He might be aware of assurances given during the acute services review in Glasgow that there would be a paramedic on board each ambulance before the proposed changes in accident and emergency provision take place. Will he outline what progress is being made in that regard?

**Mr Kerr:** I understand that there is a paramedic workforce in Glasgow of more than 140, but I am unsure whether the objective on the presence of paramedics in ambulances has been attained. I will come back to the member on that point.

**Shona Robison (Dundee East) (SNP):** Does the minister think that his job of selling the delivering for health agenda is made easier or harder by the interventions of Ms Whitefield, Mr Reid and other Labour colleagues of his in campaigns against changes to accident and emergency services? I have sympathy with the views of his colleagues. Why should the public be persuaded by his strategy, given that so many of his Labour colleagues are not persuaded by it?

**Mr Kerr:** I make no comment on current proposals by NHS Lanarkshire on the reconfiguration of services.

### National Health Service Dentists (West Lothian)

**5. Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress is being made by NHS Lothian in ensuring the provision of national health service dentistry in West Lothian. (S2O-9646)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** A number of dental practices in West Lothian continue to take on new NHS

patients. NHS Lothian has no plans to expand services in the area but has the authority to appoint salaried dentists as required.

**Bristow Muldoon:** I am told by NHS Lothian that around 92,000 people are registered with NHS dentists in West Lothian, which equates to about 56 per cent of the population. Does the minister agree that the figure should rise substantially? The filling of existing vacancies in West Lothian will not lead to a substantial rise in the figure, so will he use his position to encourage NHS Lothian to expand capacity in NHS dentistry through existing practices or the establishment of salaried dental practices?

**Mr Kerr:** I will seek to ensure that the health board uses both mechanisms that the member mentioned. Nine dental practices in West Lothian are currently taking on new NHS patients. On 17 March 2005, we announced the investment of substantial additional resources in dentistry and we want to work with dentists who are currently working in the NHS and to identify possibilities of using NHS salaried dentists, who are making a significant impact throughout Scotland. In addition, we increased the number of dentists in training and we are developing dental hygienists and other allied dental professionals, who will also make a significant contribution to ensuring that the figure that Bristow Muldoon mentioned improves during the coming years.

### Health Improvement (Deprived Areas)

**6. Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what action it is taking to improve health in areas of deprivation. (S2O-9639)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** "Delivering for Health", which was published in October, set out my plans for the national health service during the next decade and made it clear that reducing health inequalities is a key priority. Through the prevention 2010 programme, enhanced primary care teams will identify at-risk populations and provide early access to effective treatments and services. The new anticipatory care approach is being tested in five of the most deprived areas in Scotland this year and pilots will come on stream around September. I plan a further wave of pilots next year, before the more general application of the approach throughout NHS Scotland.

**Mr McAveety:** I welcome the minister's recent announcement of £27 million of funding to assist in the development of primary and community care premises. Given the health statistics in constituencies such as Glasgow Shettleston, will he say whether funding might be available in future to improve the quality of primary care services in such constituencies?

**Mr Kerr:** I reassure the member that communities such as the one that he represents are the focus of the prevention 2010 programme. I understand that much of Shettleston will be covered by the prevention 2010 investment. We need to ensure that we transform our health services so that they can deliver more in communities, shift the balance of care towards anticipatory and preventive care and focus on areas that are most in need. Prevention 2010 demonstrates our commitment to those objectives.

A recent study from the Glasgow centre for population health gives a more accurate picture of health in Glasgow and demonstrates that the life expectancy of men and women in the city is improving. Nevertheless, the gap is growing, which is a big challenge for us—hence programmes and activity such as prevention 2010. Glasgow is also no longer the coronary capital of Europe, and teenage pregnancy and smoking rates are reducing.

### Picture Archiving Computer System

**7. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how the new picture archiving computer system—PACS—will assist the sharing of diagnostic information. (S2O-9634)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** I had the great pleasure of meeting radiologists and senior managers of Kodak at the Southern general hospital last week to sign the contract for the roll-out of PACS during the coming two years. I was greatly impressed with the high quality of the digital images, which in this case were of skull X-rays. Such images will be available to clinical staff to share in their hospital and, through a central archive, throughout Scotland. Patients will benefit from better clinical care as a result of better image quality and from the facility for clinicians to share their knowledge in diagnosis and treatment. There will also be fewer exposures to radiation because of the better quality and reduced loss of films, and an ability to retain and locate old images more effectively.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** The minister is aware of the cutting-edge work in the field that has been done and is taking place at Forth Park hospital in my constituency. The development of the system at Forth Park has involved clinicians, patients and local industry and has allowed the development of networking and telemedicine. The system provides benefits for Fife patients. Will he assure me that any national system will take cognisance of the best practice that has been developed in partnership at Forth Park?

**Mr Kerr:** I acknowledge the work that has been done in partnership at Forth Park and throughout Scotland by clinicians, the national health service team and the Scottish Executive Health

Department. We work to innovate and to inspire NHS staff. As the results of their hard efforts become national benchmarks for best practice, and as we take the work from Forth Park throughout Scotland, that will be good not only for patients, but for staff, because it will allow them to contribute to NHS Scotland's success and to enhance their jobs, and their job satisfaction.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 8 has been withdrawn.

#### NHS 24

**9. Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what improvements have been achieved in the performance of NHS 24. (S2O-9648)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** Last year's independent report on NHS 24 contained a number of recommendations on improving the organisation's performance. Two of the main areas were improving access to the service and reducing call-back. In February 2005, NHS 24 answered 73 per cent of its calls within 30 seconds of the end of the welcome message. In February this year, the figure had risen to 99 per cent of calls being answered within 30 seconds, and the average time taken to answer a call was 3 seconds, compared with 52 seconds in February the previous year. In February this year, call-back was used for only 13 per cent of calls, compared with 46 per cent in February 2005. As a result of those changes, 93 per cent of serious and urgent calls were dealt with within 20 minutes and 97 per cent of non-urgent calls were dealt with within 60 minutes. However, none of us is complacent about the performance of NHS 24, which we continue to monitor to ensure that the improved levels are sustainable and maintained.

**Dr Murray:** I am sure that everybody is pleased about the improved performance, but does the minister agree that that owes much to the devolution of services to local call centres, such as that in Dumfries and Galloway royal infirmary, at times of high demand? Will he reassure the Parliament that the use of local call centres will continue and that NHS 24 will not follow the similar organisation south of the border, NHS Direct, in centralising the nurse adviser system?

**Mr Kerr:** In Scotland, NHS 24 has become a successful model. It has had its challenges and problems, and strategic mistakes were made during the formation of the organisation, but we have learned the lessons and the organisation's performance has improved dramatically. That is not only down to NHS 24's staff and management—whom I commend for their hard work and efforts—but to the national health service, which provides support for out-of-hours services, and to the Scottish Ambulance Service,

which has linkages with NHS 24. The satellite activity that the member describes has been a crucial and beneficial part of the transformation of the organisation, which has given patients much greater confidence in a much-needed part of the NHS.

#### NHS Western Isles (Inspection)

**10. Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to carry out the annual inspection of NHS Western Isles. (S2O-9593)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Mr Andy Kerr):** I plan to conduct this year's annual review of NHS Western Isles on 11 September in Stornoway. The precise arrangements will be announced nearer the time. I expect to focus on the board's progress in achieving financial balance and delivering safe, sustainable and quality services to patients.

**Rob Gibson:** I welcome those commitments to improve services in the Western Isles.

Might the minister consider holding the inspection sooner, given the mixed reactions from the unions to the action plan proposed by the management, the potential burden on finances represented by any substantive payments to staff who are in dispute—or, indeed, suspended—and the fact that the on-going situation is not helping to clear up the atmosphere of distrust? Will he confirm that he thinks that 11 September is early enough to deal with those matters thoroughly?

**Mr Kerr:** As I have said on many occasions, those matters are best dealt with—and can only be dealt with—through local partnership, with the engagement of the trade unions, the clinicians and the local management of the board. Such matters are not resolved by ministers flying in and saying, "You must fix this." I remain concerned about some of the issues that have been raised with me, but progress has been made locally. People are sitting down and talking maturely about the challenges that are being faced. I look forward to learning the results of that mature discussion on my visit to the islands.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Will you make a ruling on whether it is in order for Ms Robison to use question time to misrepresent the views of Lanarkshire Labour members, who are not against any change that would improve the health of their constituents but who are contributing legitimately to the consultation process that is being carried out by the board of NHS Lanarkshire?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that there is nothing in the standing orders to prevent members from scoring partisan political points. That is probably just as well.

## Historic Environment Policy

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh):**

The next item of business is a debate on the new Scottish historic environment policy series.

14:57

**The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson):** I am delighted to have this opportunity to highlight the work being undertaken to set out our policies on the historic environment.

It is worth pausing to consider what we mean by the term “historic environment”. The historic environment is all around us. Scotland’s countryside looks the way it does because more than 300 generations have used and managed the land and the sea and built villages and towns. Most of all, though, the historic environment is about communities and the people who live in them; not just the people of Scotland today, but the people who lived in Scotland before us and those who will come after us.

The historic environment shapes our surroundings, creates a sense of place and gives Scotland an identity of which we can all be proud. We have been bequeathed a rich heritage, which is recognised throughout the world. Scotland’s heritage represents 10,000 years of investment in our landscape and every generation has left its mark. We can see that depth of time in the pattern of streets established hundreds of years ago or in the pattern of fields and woods. That historic environment reminds us that others have lived here before us and, most important, reminds us that others will follow. We have a duty and a responsibility to live our lives and to manage our world so that we are proud to pass it on to our children.

Our historic environment is one of this nation’s greatest assets, which continues to grow in value and which we can use to the benefit of our country. It is a unique resource for education. Historic Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland and many private owners are committed to providing first-class education programmes, but we can also learn from the historic buildings and sites that surround us in every part of Scotland. We get a great sense of place and belonging from the sites and buildings that are around us, and caring for them can be a good way of bringing communities together. Our historic sites and landscapes are critical to our tourism industry. They are our unique selling point, attracting 85 per cent of the visitors who come to Scotland. They are part of the Scottish brand. We should remind ourselves of the economic benefits. Almost half of the £6.5 billion turnover of the Scottish construction industry is spent on repair and

maintenance rather than on new build. We are becoming more aware of the need to conserve energy, and our 47,000 listed buildings represent our most sustainable buildings, created as they are from natural and mostly local materials that last for decades or even centuries.

Most people assume that our rich heritage of sites, buildings, places and landscapes is cared for by charities and the Government. However, most of Scotland’s historic environment is cared for by private individuals and small businesses. We all have a role to play in the protection of some part of our past. Even if we do not own or look after a historic building or site, we can make a difference by keeping an eye on what is happening to a familiar site or building as we pass it by.

However, national and local Government and other institutional stakeholders have a vital role to play in supporting individuals, businesses and charities in protecting our heritage. Over the past century, national and local Government have played a growing part in the care of our historic assets through legislation, through the town and country planning system and through partnership working with bodies such as the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Communities Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Historic Scotland is the key central Government agency dealing with the historic environment, an integral part of the Scottish Executive and an important part of my portfolio. Three years ago, my predecessor commissioned a review of Historic Scotland. The key recommendations of that review were that the agency must be more transparent, more accountable to the people of Scotland, their Government and stakeholders and that it must be more flexible and more focused on the delivery of high-quality service to the new Scotland.

We have delivered on those recommendations. For example, three non-executive directors have been appointed to the board of Historic Scotland to provide the external challenge that the review identified as desirable and there is a real commitment to engaging with stakeholders. Further, the two inspectorates that were responsible for historic buildings and ancient monuments have been combined into a single unit to provide high-quality service to owners and occupiers, which will ensure consistency, flexibility, transparent decision making and accountability.

A particularly important recommendation in the review was that there should be a policy statement for the historic environment in Scotland, developed in consultation with stakeholders, building on the First Minister’s St Andrew’s day speech and the

national cultural strategy and approved by the Executive. The response to that recommendation is the Scottish historic environment policy series—I will refer to the papers as SHEPs from now on. The launch of the series and of the current consultations marks a milestone in the process of change at Historic Scotland. For the first time, not only since devolution, but since the first legislation was passed in 1882, we are developing detailed policy statements on many aspects of the historic environment. It is important that we are doing so in an open way, through public and stakeholder consultation.

The current programme for the production of the SHEPs will see around a dozen either published or out for public consultation by March 2008. They will cover subjects such as the listing of historic buildings, the processes of listed building and scheduled monument consent, how we deal with battlefields and the protection of the marine historic environment.

SHEP 1 and the other papers in the series, when published in their final form, will sit alongside and complement the Scottish planning policy series and other similar documents.

Today, we have in front of us the first three papers in the series, two of which were issued for public consultation on 31 March. The third was published in its final form on the same day. Copies of all three are in the Parliament's library and are available on the websites of the Executive and Historic Scotland. I will deal first with the two that we are consulting on.

SHEP 1 sets the scene for the other papers. It is the policy statement that provides a framework for more detailed strategic and operational policies that inform the day-to-day work of a range of organisations that have a role and interest in the historic environment. Those include the Scottish Executive, local authorities and the range of bodies that are accountable to Scottish ministers.

Our aims are to realise the full potential of the historic environment as an economic, educational and cultural resource across every part of Scotland and for the widest possible range of people; to maximise the role of the historic environment in achieving the wider aims of social and economic regeneration; to identify what forms our historic environment takes and protect and manage it in a sustainable way; and to break down the intellectual and physical barriers to its wider accessibility.

By putting in place a strategic policy framework for the historic environment, investing in its delivery and working in partnership with others, we are determined to achieve three key outcomes for Scotland's historic environment: that the historic environment is cared for, protected and enhanced

for the benefit of our own and future generations; that there is increased public appreciation and enjoyment of the historic environment among all the people of Scotland and visitors to the country; and that the historic environment's importance as a key asset in Scotland's economic, social and cultural success is recognised and skilfully harnessed. That bold vision is achievable. The historic environment can make a valuable contribution to our wider agenda to create an aspiring, confident country with sustainable economic growth, confident communities and a vibrant and dynamic cultural life, and one that offers unparalleled tourism opportunities.

SHEP 3, which is out to public consultation, deals with gardens and designed landscapes. Those places are important tourist attractions, rich wildlife havens and major parts of the Scottish scenery. They are also living examples of unique artistic talent and vision. They are widely enjoyed by people of all ages, backgrounds and cultures. For 20 years, Government has recognised the need to identify and protect the most important examples, such as Drummond Castle in Perthshire and Torosay Castle on the Isle of Mull. At the moment, 346 sites are included in the inventory. Inclusion means that a site receives recognition and a degree of protection through the planning system. The consultation process includes questions about whether those places need greater statutory protection and how sites might be selected. The document also seeks views on Historic Scotland's role in that.

The final SHEP on the table today, which is now published in its final form, deals with the protection of Scotland's nationally important ancient monuments and archaeological sites through the process of scheduling. That SHEP is the result of the most comprehensive review of the principles and processes of scheduling that has been undertaken, certainly since 1979 but, in some ways, since 1882. Scheduling imposes restrictions on what the owner of a nationally important site can do to it. It is, therefore, vital that scheduling is undertaken on the basis of sound principles and through processes that are both transparent and accountable. Those principles are set out in SHEP 2 along with guidance to Historic Scotland as to how I want them to be put into practice.

The review has produced a new strategic approach to scheduling, with greater local involvement and better targets to measure Historic Scotland's progress in identifying and protecting sites. SHEP 2 marks the formal launch of new, tighter and clearer criteria for deciding which sites should be scheduled. They are the first scheduling criteria ever to be drafted with public involvement, and it is important to record the fact that that involvement led to significant changes between the first draft and the version that we are able to



read today. That process of consultation is fundamental to my vision for the policy framework. This week, Historic Scotland's scheduling team is in Dumfries and Galloway, working under the policies that are set out in SHEP 2.

The SHEP on scheduling takes us back to the review of Historic Scotland. Another key recommendation was that the agency should engage with stakeholders in a debate about its practices. The chief executive of Historic Scotland will oversee the preparation of a series of operational policy papers that will make explicit the way in which the agency will deliver the strategic aims that are set out in the SHEPs. The first operational policy, on volunteering, has been sent out to consultation and will be launched this summer. Others will follow.

SHEPs 1 and 3 are now open for public consultation; other SHEPs and Historic Scotland's operational policies will follow. The papers are only drafts. The people of Scotland and the other stakeholders in our historic environment now have a real opportunity to work with Scottish ministers to put in place a policy framework that is fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century—a framework that will protect and manage Scotland's historic environment and set out bold aims and achievable results for the benefit of our own and future generations.

15:10

**Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I am delighted that this debate has been able to get to first base. The last time the minister brought a debate on an aspect of our historic environment, it had to be cancelled. It was meant to be a debate about architecture, but the roof fell in on the chamber that day. However, Rob Gibson pointed out to me that the roof fell in during his water debate; I hope that there is no association with the persons who were present when that happened.

As a nation, we have a rich historic environment of which we can be proud. It ranges from specific monuments to everyday features that have developed through human history. It can include anything from architectural sites such as the Antonine wall to the ramparts of our great castles such as Edinburgh and Stirling. It could even include the beautiful terraced properties of Charlotte Square that are occupied by our very own First Minister, or the beauty of the truncated spurs, hanging valleys and corries of Glencoe.

Those many attributes have served to shape our nation and are often drawn upon in order to reflect Scotland at home and internationally. The engineering brilliance of the new Falkirk wheel—the unique rotating boat lift—the fantastic engineering of the Forth road bridge, the natural beauty of the shores of Morar that were made

famous in the film "Local Hero", and the guardian of Glencoe, Buachaille Etive Mor, have all been used at different times as symbols of our nation and of what Scotland is about at home and abroad.

Unfortunately, as a nation we can sometimes take for granted our fantastic historic environment. It is important to recognise its value because it is an asset in its own right. In order to make the most of that asset, we must recognise the cultural, educational, economic and social benefits that can be derived from our historic environment. The documents published by Historic Scotland acknowledge the key components that are important if we want to actualise the potential of our historic environment, although to date they have been limited in their expression of how we should go about achieving that.

As a nation, we should be looking to make the most of our historic environment. We should aspire to become a country that is internationally recognised for good practice in conserving and making the best of our cultural heritage. If we are to achieve that international recognition, it is important that our historic environment policy does not sit in isolation from other policy areas. It must be fully integrated with our environmental, social and cultural policies in order to make the best of it. Although the consultation document acknowledges that, it is important that it is actualised into policy that can make a difference.

Another key to making the most of our historic environment is to ensure that agencies such as Historic Scotland work in partnership with the individuals and organisations that have a role to play. Historic Scotland has an important role to play in implementing the Executive's policies, but local authorities, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland, other voluntary organisations, and private individuals all have a role to play in the preservation and conservation of our historic environment. It is important that that preservation and conservation are about maximising access and benefit to the whole nation.

A couple of examples illustrate the need for partnership working and how different agencies have a role to play. During the recent Easter recess, I had the pleasure of visiting Abbotsford House just outside Galashiels, where my colleague Christine Grahame cut the ribbon to open the Nigel Tranter exhibition, which contains a display signed by Nigel Tranter and to which I donated my copy of one of his books. Abbotsford House is an important historic building as it was the home of Sir Walter Scott. Without saying too much about it—Christine Grahame will no doubt say more, as she was involved in the campaign to

save the building—I believe that Abbotsford House is a good example of how private individuals, trustees and others need to work collectively to ensure that we properly benefit from the important historic buildings of our nation.

Another example is the Antonine wall, which, as the northernmost frontier of the great Roman empire, was built at a time when the Scots were not quite so hospitable to visitors. It is hoped that the wall will become a world heritage site in 2009. Given that it spans from West Dunbartonshire to Bo'ness, a wide range of local authorities and agencies will have a part to play in ensuring that world heritage status is successfully secured. Our historic environment policy must ensure that all the interested parties are brought together in collective working so that we get the best from such natural assets.

I want to make a couple of specific points about SHEP 1. I welcome the general thrust of the document, but it gives only limited information on exactly how the Executive intends to pursue some of the objectives. Section 6 of the document acknowledges the need for

“investment in the fabric and management of Scotland's historic environment”.

It is absolutely crucial that we have a grants system that helps to support the maintenance and preservation of our historic environment while ensuring that buildings remain accessible. My concern with the grants that are currently available for the maintenance of such properties is that they result in people who want to gain admission being levied with a charge for the upkeep and maintenance of the building. The danger is that prohibitive costs will prevent people from accessing such buildings. We need a grants scheme that strikes the right balance between preserving the asset and maintaining and promoting public access to it so that both current and future generations benefit from it.

That leads me to the issue of accessibility and understanding, which is also dealt with in the document. To use the example that I mentioned earlier, we need to ensure that British Waterways works with those who are responsible for the Antonine wall so that visitors to the Falkirk wheel can also benefit from seeing what they can of the Antonine wall in the area. Although the different agencies involved in such matters will often say that they are working together, such collective working is not always demonstrated on the ground. We need to ensure that visitors to the sites get the best from them. As the policy moves forward after the consultation, I hope that clearer guidance will be issued on how such organisations must work more in partnership with one another.

I will draw my remarks to a close by suggesting that, if we get those issues right, the final key outcome that is outlined in part 8 of SHEP 1,

“Releasing the full economic potential”

of our historic environment, will be actualised at both local and national level. I look forward to the outcome of the consultation.

15:19

**Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife)**

**(Con):** As we have heard, Scotland is indeed fortunate to have so many historic buildings, monuments, gardens and sites that attract visitors and tourists alike. Many of those buildings have been restored by sympathetic owners or by organisations such as the National Trust for Scotland. Just as I pay tribute to private citizens who have done so much to preserve our built and landscape heritage, I should also mention the sterling work that the National Trust has done over the years. Its small houses initiative in places such as Dunkeld, Culross and the east neuk of Fife has resulted in domestic houses being restored and then made available to the public either on a for sale or for lease basis. Those have acted as an inspiration to planners and the public alike.

However, many buildings are still at risk. Historic monuments are still crumbling, and some historic gardens and parklands are mouldering wildernesses, badly in need of preservation. For those reasons, I welcome the launch of the Executive's SHEPs, which set out ministers' strategic policies for the historic environment and the operational policies that Historic Scotland should follow in implementing them. There is merit in identifying historic gardens and designed landscapes, and perhaps in creating a statutory listed garden status, in the same way as we have listed buildings. Of course, a balance must be struck between such a statutory list and the rights of private landowners, who have played a major part in preserving our cultural heritage. It is not always essential for primary legislation to be in place for the historic environment to be preserved. Often a fairer, clearer planning system and a strong economy are what is required to motivate private landowners, developers and local authorities.

There are buildings all over Scotland on the at-risk register—many of them listed—that are simply crumbling away. Although most owners are to be congratulated on the sympathetic way in which they have gone about saving our built heritage, a small proportion have not risen to the challenge. Around a dozen buildings in north-east Fife are on the architectural at-risk list. One such is 1-3 High Street, Newburgh, within the designated Newburgh conservation area. In the buildings-at-

risk register, the house is described as a three-storey townhouse with moulded windows and crow-stepped gables. It dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is B listed. The house has stood vacant since the early 1990s.

On 30 December 2002, *The Courier* reported that compulsory purchase proceedings were to be initiated by the council. However, in June 2003 local planners reported that the building had been sold. Three years later, the house continues to crumble and is in a much worse state than it was more than a decade ago. Sadly, my information is that the co-owner of the property is a member of the Parliament. As a courtesy, I tried to contact him today, but since I failed to reach him, I will withhold his name at this stage. In any event, he has done nothing illegal. However, if a member of the Parliament shows so little awareness of the blight that he continues to allow by not developing a listed building in his ownership, what kind of example is that to set to others? The hard fact is that neither the local planning authorities nor, apparently, Historic Scotland have powers to force a recalcitrant owner to upgrade an important historic building.

However, while failing to save many of our at-risk buildings, Historic Scotland is simultaneously seen as the dead hand that prevents landowners from developing properties appropriately or from pulling them down if they are beyond salvation. Can it be right that, a decade after Lex Brown bought the ruined 13<sup>th</sup> century Tioram castle in Moidart and expressed himself willing to restore it at his own expense, Historic Scotland is still holding him to ransom over his development plans? The dispute boils down to whether Mr Brown restores the castle to his preferred date of 1715, when it was torched by Clanranald to stop it falling into Hanoverian hands, or whether it should be left as a spectacularly scenic ruin. Historic Scotland has adamantly defended the latter position, despite the fact that other scenic ruins, including Castle Stalker, Dunderave on Loch Fyne and Dairsie Castle, near where I live, have been developed, although all of them were immortalised as ruins by painters of the calibre of Turner, Varley and McCulloch. Perhaps the most scenically situated of all, Eilean Donan, was restored from a ruin. Castle Tioram has developed into a kind of virility test between Historic Scotland and a sympathetic developer. How long will the minister allow the farce to continue?

Equally, can it be right that 10 years since Historic Scotland scheduled the wartime training airfield of HMS Jackdaw near Crail in Fife as a national monument, that ramshackle collection of huts—which never saw a shot fired in anger—should still lie mouldering away? Despite the involvement of the local planning authorities, a specially commissioned consultants' report and

the best efforts of the landowner to be allowed to develop even part of the site, agreement with the intransigent and apparently impoverished Historic Scotland seems no closer.

A review of the agency carried out in 2004 by the Executive concluded that there was a clear need for a culture change within Historic Scotland. I heard what the minister said in her opening remarks, but actions speak louder than words. The Cultural Commission recommended that there might be benefits in Historic Scotland consulting Architecture and Design Scotland on matters of consent and the listing process. Hear, hear to that, but when will it happen?

As an executive agency, Historic Scotland has guardianship of many buildings that are currently vacant and are being maintained in a necrophiliac way as ruins at public expense when they could be sympathetically restored and made to earn their keep as living buildings. Although the Conservatives applaud the intention to review existing policies for preserving our historic buildings, monuments and gardens, in our view the current policy documents do not really tackle the problem. There must be fewer grand strategies and more community and local involvement. Existing planning legislation needs to be tightened to address problems such as the listed Newburgh building to which I referred. Posturing Government agencies need to be brought to heel if we are to make real progress in safeguarding our historic environment.

15:26

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** I am not sure whether I need to declare an interest. I am a friend of Historic Scotland and a member of the National Trust for Scotland. I include in my curriculum vitae the fact that I enjoy visiting ruins—I used to get many jokes about Liberals and ruins, but fewer jokes are made about that now.

In less politically correct days, my first-ever election photo, in 1970, featured me, my wife, my two children and my dog at Blackness Castle. It was a very nice picture, but I did not win the election.

The subject of the debate is of great interest to me. The Executive documents are pretty, helpful and provide a good basis on which to go forward.

I will concentrate on arousing interest in the whole issue. Many people enjoy visiting ancient buildings and so on, but many more people might enjoy doing so if they knew about the opportunities that exist. We must get Historic Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland, local councils, schools and tourist boards to co-operate better to promote the idea of having a good day out visiting gardens,

castles, prehistoric remains or whatever. One way of encouraging the idea is to promote Scottish history books and history magazines better than we do now. They do not get much encouragement. We must get Scots more interested in our history and culture.

We should arouse local interest. Volunteers often help to keep a local landmark open and show people round, but that is based on local enthusiasm. We could better promote buildings that are relevant to famous Scots—perhaps especially people who have gone abroad and done good things in Europe, the colonies, America or the Commonwealth, as well as people who have achieved good things at home. People are interested in people, so it is helpful if buildings and communities are related to people with whom we can identify.

Local museums are important, but some are very good and others are very bad. Some councils do not adequately support their museums. Another problem is that often people do not know about good museums. Consider the example of Callendar park in Falkirk, which is a super place. It has a marvellous situation, contains a really good re-creation of old workshops, shops, houses and so on and has marvellous grounds. However, I suspect that perhaps 1 per cent of the population of Edinburgh has heard of it, although it could offer them a nice day out. It is a council property. The Bo'ness railway, which is run by a voluntary organisation, is also a really good experience. We must somehow publicise those places better than we do now.

Councils should improve the way in which they look after their archives. As I recently became involved with others on the issue, I am aware of the City of Edinburgh Council's disgraceful failure to look after its archives. The council has started to improve the position. Archives are an important part of the history of an area; they tie in with the buildings and so on.

Special funds should be set up to promote school visits to ancient monuments of all sorts. Again, those visits not only make a good day out for the kids but arouse a lot of interest in our heritage.

More exciting events could be mounted at our historic buildings. One of my many failures in life was in trying to get the City of Edinburgh Council and the Army to do a re-enactment of Thomas Randolph, Earl of Moray, and his guys climbing the castle walls to capture Edinburgh Castle at the time of Robert the Bruce. I think that people were worried about insurance or some such thing—anyway, the plans fell down.

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** No fun there.

**Donald Gorrie:** I know.

I succeeded in getting the guidebook to Linlithgow Palace to mention that Binney and his people had cunningly captured it from the English. We should re-enact these things—not that we hate the English; we would simply be celebrating our independence.

Large chunks of Scottish history are neglected. I refer to our industrial heritage and entrepreneurship. Although we have a number of good industrial, farming and fishing museums, they are not as well known as they should be. We could do even more to celebrate the huge contribution that Scotland made to the industrial revolution and the enlightenment, although it is perhaps a bit harder to demonstrate the enlightenment. It does not help when artists produce the kind of awful statue that we have of David Hume. Nonetheless, the idea behind commissioning it is good.

I turn to trees and gardens. The policy series features gardens. At the moment, we are being lobbied by an excellent group of people who would like us to create a register of historical trees and establish an historic tree trail. We could really sell that as a day out for tourist and educational groups. People love gardens. In my 26 years as a councillor, I was always worried that a gardening candidate would stand against me. I knew that if that happened, they would sweep to victory. People think that gardening is far more important than politics or any rubbish of that sort.

Without getting too involved in Castle Tioram, I think that we should not be too precious about keeping buildings just as they were. Churches are an issue in that regard. Unfortunately, church congregations are dwindling. Despite that, churches can play an important part in the community. I have been told about quite a number of churches whose congregations wish to reconfigure the churches to make them more of a community asset and community centre. People have been told that they cannot do so because it would mean moving a pew or marginally altering a window. It is more important to have buildings that can be used; we should not be too precious about some piffling detail. The important issue of buildings at risk has been mentioned in the debate. We should look after such buildings and sort out a future for them.

People like trails—tourists or local people alike. A trail can be made to take in a series of lovely trees, gardens, Pictish brochs, engineering centres, fishing or farming landmarks—trails can take in all sorts of different things. We should publicise them. We could have a big advertisement that says, "This is the world's best collection of Pictish stones." Nobody other than Scotland has Pictish stones; we are bound to have

the best ones. Why do we not promote them seriously?

There are many ways in which more excitement could be created. The documents are a good start. We must look after what we have and excite people about all of it. The more people know about their past, the more they will look forward to their future.

15:34

**Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP):** When Ted Brocklebank started talking about mouldering wildernesses, I wondered whether he had been peeking over the wall into my garden, but perhaps not.

Unlike my garden, the rest of my constituency is full of sites and buildings that track the development of Scottish culture and society. They run the gamut from pagan standing stones to Celtic crosses; from St John's kirk, where John Knox fuelled the fire of the reformation, to the ecumenical St Mary's monastery on Kinnoull hill, which probably has John Knox spinning in his grave; from Roman forts to General Wade's roads; from the bloody memories of Sheriffmuir to Innerpefferay, where the calm of the oldest library in the country exists; from the 10<sup>th</sup> century round tower of Abernethy—an early millennium project in the east of my constituency—to the remains of the Pictish fort of Dundurn at St Fillans in the west of my constituency.

**Christine Grahame:** Has she missed anything?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** I do not think so, but no doubt my constituents will tell me if they feel that I have.

Scotland's history is painted in bold colours throughout my constituency. Perth is one of Scotland's ancient cities and Perthshire is arguably the place where our nation came into being. The historic environment plays a huge role in the economic life of the whole county and, as the minister acknowledged, of the whole of Scotland. It is important to Perthshire and to me that the Executive gets this policy right.

I will address some key issues on the general questions of the identification, designation, protection and management of the historic environment and then consider the specific issues that relate to two important sites in my constituency.

In section 3 of SHEP 1, the Scottish Executive lays out its "vision and policies" for the historic environment and stresses that Scottish ministers cannot undertake those on their own. It looks to Historic Scotland to work with a wide range of bodies and organisations to play

"a crucial role in conserving the fabric of the historic environment and allowing and promoting public access and enjoyment".

That is an essential point that must not be allowed to be just empty rhetoric. Much of Scotland's historic environment is in private hands, whether it belongs to individuals or institutions of one kind or another. Not only must there be close co-operation; there must be recognition that unless a private owner has an unlimited disposable income, it is likely that the building or monument will simply not be looked after properly. The saga of St Peter's seminary in Cardross springs to mind. If we decide that it is in the public interest for a part of our heritage to be preserved, then we have to accept that public money must play a role in its preservation.

By the same token, we must be far more realistic than the authorities seem to be at the moment in our approach to listing properties. The present system often means that the private owner of a listed property either is left spending vast amounts on its upkeep or, rather more likely, leaves it to rot and decay. We heard about one rather graphic example of that in Newburgh.

One site in my constituency that is in real danger of decay is the Roman fort at Gask, which is in the hands of an extremely rich landowner with whom I have had a run-in or two over the years over the management of his lands. Rabbits cause a serious threat to the Roman site, which is literally being undermined. It is an example of a site where there have been genuine difficulties in Historic Scotland

"working together to a common purpose with individuals and businesses."

I urge the minister to ensure that the Roman fort at Gask is preserved. In the by-going, I press once more the case for the Gask ridge to be included along with the Antonine wall, which my colleague Michael Matheson mentioned, as a world heritage site. Although it is not part of the Antonine wall, it is the site of what was the oldest and northernmost linear defence system in the entire Roman empire and so is of true global significance.

In section 3.2 of SHEP 1, we see listed the criteria on which Scottish ministers intend to judge the importance of proposals to protect and manage the historic environment. I know of a project in my constituency that ticks each of the boxes but which is still struggling to secure the necessary funding to take forward an exciting development.

The plan is for the crypt at St Mary's monastery on Kinnoull hill, built in the 1860s by Perth's most famous architect, Andrew Heiton, to be redeveloped as a social and cultural facility and as a portal to Kinnoull hill, which is open to all the

citizens of Perth and, indeed, the whole of Scotland. It would act as a gateway both to the network of paths that is being developed on Kinnoull hill and to the very tranquil gardens of St Mary's itself, where the intention is to provide routes that are suitable for disabled access. However, if funding is not forthcoming, there will be no alternative use for the crypt. Indeed, there will be no use at all for the crypt, which would be sad. On behalf of my constituents, I hope that the minister will do all that she can to help to bring the plans to fruition.

My two examples pose real challenges. In the first case, the owner could probably make the required investment, but will not do so; in the second, the owners of the site—a religious order—do not have the finances to spare on such a building. I imagine that the same challenges are replicated throughout Scotland. If they are not addressed, we will not make progress.

15:40

**Christine May (Central Fife) (Lab):** The debate will give considerable comfort to the many dedicated, committed and highly qualified individuals, groups and organisations that work to discover, preserve, enhance and promote Scotland's historic environment. The documents that we are discussing provide, for the first time, a structured approach to the issue. I realise that there are great constraints out there and, indeed, recognise many of the scenarios that Roseanna Cunningham has described, as I have come across them myself. I also acknowledge Ted Brocklebank's knowledge of Fife and perhaps sympathise with his comments. I, too, know of circumstances in which, for example, the money is simply not available or the landowner feels that the public sector contribution is too low to justify his or her investment.

At this point, I should declare an interest as a trustee of Fife Historic Buildings Trust, which deals mainly with relatively recent historic buildings. Such buildings are important; indeed, I could spend my six minutes talking about them. However, members will be pleased to learn that I do not intend to do so. Instead, I wish to concentrate on the deep seam of older riches, many of which other members have referred to, that abound in Scotland and that form a significant part of the country's historic environment. Such buildings, remnants of buildings, earthworks, burial sites and artefacts teach us how our land was used and how our communities have developed and changed over the centuries. As Donald Gorrie pointed out so eloquently, it is important for Scotland's population to get a sense of where they have come from and how they got to where they are.

As a result, this debate is timely, not only because of the necessity of such a structured approach but because of the reform to the planning system that the Communities Committee is considering in the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill. We cannot talk about one issue without referring to the importance of the other. Indeed, only today, Fife Council has agreed its new 20-year structure plan, which will see a significant increase in the number of housing and other developments in Fife. As the historic kingdom's rich archaeological history and buildings must be protected from some of the depredations that can result from uncontrolled development, it is extremely important that the issue is considered alongside the introduction of any new planning regime.

I suggest to the minister and the chamber that, in comparison with, for example, Highland's 6 million acres of land, Fife's 32,000 acres contain, square foot for square foot, more historical artefacts. Because of its low-lying nature and east coast maritime location that—of course—places it close to the European mainland, Fife has been more densely populated from very early times. With its 10,000-year history of human occupation and significant archaeological and architectural record, I am sure that Fife will be a willing participant in the consultation.

I draw to the minister's attention the briefing that we received today from the Council for Scottish Archaeology. It has suggested three elements that ought to be adopted, the first being a statutory duty of care and the second being a statutory sites and monuments records service—something that I have raised before in a speech in this chamber. Such a records service might not be as onerous as one might have thought because, as far as I am aware, every local authority in Scotland, bar perhaps one, already has a voluntary register. The minister might care to consider that. Thirdly, the Council for Scottish Archaeology suggests the adoption of a target of having all significant archaeological sites in a stable or improving condition by 2010, although I think that that is unachievable and that the timescale is too short. Perhaps the minister will consider what sort of timescale would be reasonable.

I would like to touch for a moment on some of the on-going work in the kingdom with which I have been involved. In the Dysart regeneration project, in Marilyn Livingstone's constituency, work on the St Serf's tower is uncovering a deep historical record. The minister herself opened the new tourist information office in Kirkcaldy, in the ancient merchant's house, with its old wall paintings, which is an example of a building that is put to a good, practical use while still allowing its history to be appreciated. The Pictish carvings in the caves at East Wemyss are now, sadly, almost lost, and that may reflect a dispute a long time ago

with the landowner—a dispute that, in today's climate, we might not have had. The standing stones in Balfarg, Glenrothes, form the centrepiece of a lovely housing development and can be enjoyed by all the children because they are part of the recreation area. The bronze-age burial cists at Sillerhole, near Durie in Leven, were the subject of a "Time Team" investigation, and the minister will recall that two full skeletons were found there, along with a number of extremely interesting artefacts.

When I printed off the material from Fife for today's debate, I was reminded that, when I was leader of Fife Council, we produced a guidance note on archaeology and how it would be treated, and the list of types of monuments—some of which I passed to Ted Brocklebank, who had only half of the North East Fife ones—covers prehistoric ritual and funerary items and domestic, defensive and industrial sites. I could read out the list, but I will not; there are pages of it.

I know that all members want to know more about our historic kingdom, but I will move away from Fife for a moment. In our work on the Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill, we had considerable dealings with Historic Scotland about a wide range of buildings, monuments and landscape features, all of which were of significant architectural and historical interest. Historic Scotland is a powerful force for good. It has huge expertise and resources and I hope that the new structure and direction that the minister has outlined will make better use of those resources than has perhaps been the case heretofore. I invite the minister to visit the Lower Methil heritage centre, where she can see some of the work that has been happening in my constituency. I will certainly be looking at the responses to the consultation from my area, and I look forward to a further debate on the subject when those responses are in.

15:48

**Mr Dave Petrie (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** It feels most appropriate that my maiden speech should be on the topic of historic environment policy, as I live in an ancient building just down the road from one of Scotland's treasured ancient monuments, McCaig's tower in Oban. As a former rural public service employee, I am acutely aware of the vital need to protect and regenerate our heritage, and I fully recognise the need to review the policies governing the preservation of such national treasures. Scotland has a wealth of historic architecture to be proud of, developed over generations, thanks to community and local authority support. However, there is also a darker side, of ancient buildings that have been allowed to disintegrate into disrepair.

The new series of Executive policies has the laudable aim of maximising the role of our historic environment in Scottish culture. Our ancient buildings are shining examples of our heritage, and I feel particularly encouraged by the stated aim of breaking down barriers to their accessibility.

Our historic buildings are famous around the world and are wonderful drivers of tourism. However, they should also be an inspirational, educational resource for our own people and should be used distinctively to meet our cities' and towns' needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They should be preserved accordingly, but preservation does not and should not necessarily equate to increased legislation. The Scottish Executive's current policy proposals are too prescriptive and will inevitably lead to an expensive and bureaucratic quagmire. Such a situation would neither help to preserve our heritage nor identify and address current regeneration issues or levels of housing provision.

A strong economy is essential for retaining our conserved buildings and, if it is coupled with a willing and constructive partnership among politicians, landowners, developers and local authorities, there could be real security and prosperity for Scotland's historic environment. Giving a voice to landowners and commercial developers will make the strategy legitimate and fair. I support the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on architecture, which found that renovating existing properties was a cost-effective means of creating new housing.

Having experienced my baptism of fire in the Communities Committee—

**Christine Grahame:** Oh!

**Mr Petrie:** I was not pointing at Christine Grahame.

My eyes have been well and truly opened to the complex vagaries of planning legislation. The Scottish Conservative party has long argued for a thorough reform of the planning system and welcomes the long-overdue Planning etc (Scotland) Bill's aim of simplifying and speeding up the planning process. I hope that the more streamlined policy will be implemented more effectively and will lead to some of the dilapidated ancient monuments in Scotland being restored and made fully accessible to all interested parties.

I said at the beginning of my speech that I live in an ancient building. I know from experience that my current 120-year-old residence is architecturally and structurally far superior to my former, modern timber-framed abode; that level of construction skill should not be left to disintegrate. At the risk of abusing an oxymoron, I make a plea for Historic Scotland to join the 21<sup>st</sup> century by taking responsibility for the swathes of our cultural heritage that have been allowed to degenerate into unsightly ruins.

15:52

**Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD):** As declared in the register of members' interests, I am a life member of the National Trust for Scotland.

I support the three outcomes that are stressed in SHEP 1. The care, protection and enhancement of the historic environment for today's generation and future generations is immensely important, as is increasing Scots' and visitors' appreciation and enjoyment of the historic environment. I am a firm believer in the idea that the more that people see and understand the historic environment—indeed, the broader environment—the more they will protect and treasure it.

It is obvious that the historic environment is a key asset in Scotland's economic, social and cultural success and that it will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. It is particularly important not only for internal tourists but for tourists from outside Scotland. The figures for tourism in the Scottish Borders are interesting: it generates £91 million per annum from 540,000 visitors who stay overnight, but day visitors are particularly important, and the historic environment has a big role to play in attracting them. There are 7 million visits to the area per annum, leading to expenditure of £108 million. Moreover, 3,500 people are employed in tourism and tourism-related activities. The historic environment massively underpins tourists' expenditure and investment in the Borders economy.

I appreciate and accept the importance of partnership working in shaping, protecting, conserving and developing the historic environment. That partnership can involve local authorities, voluntary organisations, statutory bodies, communities, owners and small businesses, as well as VisitScotland, which has a role in ensuring that the historic environment is maintained.

There are some remarkable sites and historic monuments in the Scottish Borders. I will mention four magnificent abbeys: Dryburgh abbey contains the burial places of Sir Walter Scott and Earl Haig; Jedburgh abbey was founded by King David in 1138; Kelso abbey is a magnificent ruin; and the heart of King Robert the Bruce lies interred in a casket at Melrose abbey. There are also the great houses of the Borders, including Mellerstain, Manderston, Floors Castle and Bowhill. Indeed, I must refer to Paxton House, as my constituent, Mr Home Robertson, is here. He played a large part in developing that important facility in the south-east corner of the Borders.

Although the museum service in the Borders is clearly successful, so much more could be done, particularly with the smaller private museums and

public investment therein. For example, there is a small museum in Eyemouth that would add significantly to the visitor attractions in the area if it were enhanced in some way. However, VisitScotland is not prepared to pay a rental on the facilities that it uses within the museum. That shows a lack of joined-up thinking. VisitScotland's objectives would clearly be better met if that museum were allowed to develop. The Jim Clark Room in Duns is a magnificent example of a thematic museum, but we could do with developing the history of motor sport in Berwickshire. Initial attempts to do that were thwarted by a lack of funds.

Small museums can be immense success stories. Drumlanrig's Tower in Hawick now contains the Steve Hislop museum. He was the world motorcycle champion, but was tragically killed in a helicopter accident. Now, a lot of his trophies, bikes and equipment are displayed in Hawick, which has attracted thousands of visitors from overseas. That sort of development is extremely important.

There are occasions when the initial investment that is required to set up a facility that would enhance a local area is not achievable, either through traditional public means or through private investment. I suggest to the minister that a small museums fund be set up. Aside from some grant aid that could be given out, it might be possible to obtain loans against future visitor numbers. That would be a good way to enable small museums to establish themselves and grow and create major extra attractions for local areas.

There is an undeveloped area of particular importance: we need to ensure that works of art that are stuck in storerooms around Scotland are taken out and displayed as widely as possible. In the past, I have attempted to persuade the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body to display more works of art around the Parliament. There are some very good examples of outstations of the National Galleries of Scotland, such as Paxton House, displaying works of art. I have mentioned Paxton House twice now—I will do so a third time if John Home Robertson is lucky.

Those outstations are important developments, but we could do more if we encouraged local authorities and private collections to lend works to attractions in their areas and thus shared the cultural assets. The ownership would remain the same, but we could facilitate the sharing of the assets to broaden the possibilities for communities. Many of the smaller museums could have proper curatorial input, and sharing and borrowing could be enhanced by schemes run by Historic Scotland and museums services throughout the country. That would enhance the visitor experience in a number of places.



Major historical buildings throughout Scotland require assistance, some of which Ted Brocklebank mentioned. I will finish by referring to one fantastic building in my constituency—Greenlaw town hall. It is a magnificent structure, but it is falling rapidly into decay through lack of use. It might well feature—I hope that it does—in the BBC's "Restoration" programme. I invite the minister to come and see it. I shall be happy to show it to her. I am sure that she will be impressed by the magnificent facility. She might even offer a little grant aid to those who are trying to secure its future use.

16:00

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** I draw to members' attention my membership of Historic Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland and the Scottish Ecological Design Association, and mention en passant my convenership of the cross-party group on architecture and the built environment.

The debate has been interesting. I will focus on one or two remarks that others have made before I embark on a few points. First, Donald Gorrie was kind enough to draw to members' attention the exhibition on trees that I am hosting in the garden lobby. Many trees in Scotland are older than any building in the country. The Fortingall yew dates from the time of Christ, which means that it is nearly 2,000 years old, and scores of other trees are between 600 and 1,000 years old. I ask the Executive to consider carefully having a national register of historic trees and giving such trees as much protection as it can afford in the near future.

Ted Brocklebank raised a lot of issues. I have never agreed with Ted Brocklebank on fishing, and I rarely agree with him on anything else, but from beginning to end I agreed with almost every single word of his speech. There has to be room for a rational approach to restoring old buildings, not just to a visibly acceptable standard but to a state in which they can be used rationally and economically. That means that we need to consider some of the nit-picking regulations on how one can improve one's windows. In some parts of Edinburgh one is not allowed to put in double glazing, yet there is now double glazing for old sash windows that is indistinguishable from ordinary plate glass. Nit-picking, restrictive regulation in conservation areas is preventing people from exercising their right to stop wasting an awful lot of energy. That does not fit with modern thinking about conservation and the development of a proper policy of reducing the amount of energy that our houses use.

Dave Petrie referred to a meeting of the cross-party group on architecture and the built environment at which we learned about a situation

that I did not realise was so bad. Members might have noticed properties in Princes Street where the upper floors are unused—only the lower floors are used, as street-level shops. The owners of those buildings, or the people who lease them, are deliberately not using the upper floors because it saves them tax. Particularly in Glasgow, there are tens of thousands of square feet of unused space in buildings that are listed or should be listed, because there is no encouragement to use it. If we had land value taxation—which I bring up occasionally—it would be used, because the full value of buildings would be taxed.

The Executive needs to pay attention to that gross underuse of buildings in our city centres. Because they are underused, they are likely to decay and become so decrepit that their owners will decide to knock them down and replace them with the sort of shoddy 25-year public-private partnership project that makes its owners a lot of money before being knocked down and replaced with another such project—and so on.

Roseanna Cunningham expressed concern about a Roman fort. I have been approached about that, and I assure the minister that the situation is extremely serious. I support everything that Roseanna Cunningham said about it. I agree with Michael Matheson's comments on Abbotsford House. It would be an awful shame if the building were not supported and put into the public domain as soon as possible. Abbotsford House should receive as much support as can be afforded to it.

Local authorities employ plenty of planners but few architects. How will we develop decent architectural planning and build the architectural heritage of the future if local authorities do not employ people who understand architecture?

16:06

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** Like Michael Matheson, I remember what happened when the Parliament planned to debate architectural policy, so when I heard that we were to debate the historic environment policy I was concerned about the historic environment of this building and the area around it.

I am not quite sure why Donald Gorrie thinks that being photographed with his dog is politically incorrect, but I wondered whether the dog was called Shep. Perhaps the previous environmental policy was called Old Shep—but I will move on.

I welcome the publication of the SHEP 1 report and consultation paper on the historic environment policy. Although the consultation paper does not ask specific questions, it invites suggestions about how key outcomes can be achieved. It is unlikely that anyone will disagree with the key outcomes, but the consultation process will give people an

opportunity to feed in information about how we can achieve the results that we seek for the historic environment.

Like other members, I am pleased that SHEP 1 says:

"The protection of the historic environment is not about preventing change. The historic environment ... is dynamic and its protection and conservation is about ensuring that change is managed intelligently".

That statement is important and welcome. In the past, the protection of the historic environment has sometimes appeared to prevent the possibility of adapting buildings to new use. Other members have referred to that approach, which can mean that historic buildings are condemned to lie empty and disused instead of being sympathetically adapted. I understand that the approach represented a reaction to activity in the 1960s. I was brought up in Edinburgh, where the desecration of buildings on Princes Street and elsewhere in the historic environment provoked a response that perhaps swung too far in the opposite direction. There has been too much resistance to the minor adaptation of historic buildings to enable them to be used and I welcome a change in that approach, if such a change is happening.

There is probably no place more appropriate for reflection on the reuse of historic buildings than the Scottish Parliament complex, where Queensberry House has found a new life as part of a contemporary building. There are many good examples of the successful merger of historic and modern buildings; the Lighthouse in Glasgow, for example, which is mentioned in SHEP 1, is an outstanding example of how contemporary and older styles of architecture can complement each other.

In my constituency, A-listed buildings on the Crichton campus have been sensitively adapted to provide accommodation for the university campus and business park. The Scottish Executive's national health service central register, which was relocated to Dumfries last year, is housed in one such building.

The most recent developments on the site involve the extension of Easterbrook Hall to provide enhanced conference facilities and the incorporation of a grade A-listed building, Johnston House, into a new hotel that will open this autumn. There was some resistance to the development from Historic Scotland, which was at first suspicious of some of the plans that involved the grade A-listed building. About a year ago, I arranged and attended a meeting with the chief executive of Historic Scotland and representatives from the Crichton Development Company, Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scottish Enterprise Dumfries and Galloway. We all went

somewhat mob-handed to Longmore House, where we had a successful conversation with Historic Scotland, out of which came ways of addressing some of the concerns about the plans. Eventually, mutually acceptable plans were drawn up, which will allow the project to be completed. I am pleased that the new facilities will be opened this autumn, as they are important for the local economy and for the development of the Crichton site. I say to members of various parties that the site will make an excellent venue for party conferences, a point that I have been trying to drive home to my party.

In Annan in my constituency, Bridge House, which is an absolutely outstanding example of a Georgian town house and which was the home of Annan academy when Thomas Carlyle was a pupil, sadly lay vacant for many years, despite the best efforts of a trust to try to find funding and alternative uses for it. One benefit from the decommissioning of the Chapelcross power station is that a new use has at long last been found for Bridge House and that fine house will be back in use.

Like other members, I am concerned about the powers, or perhaps I should say the lack of powers, that local authorities have to deal with the owners of historic buildings, or of buildings in historic areas, who allow them to fall into disrepair. I will briefly give two examples. The house and gardens in the centre of Dumfries that inspired J M Barrie to write "Peter Pan" have lain vacant and untended for many years. The property is in ownership and, every so often, rumour goes round the town that it will be used. The most recent rumour that I heard was that it was to become a hotel with a theme park as a garden. However, nobody seems to be able to track down the owner. I have tried to find out who the owner is through the assessor's roll and the solicitors who act on their behalf, but I cannot. The council cannot do so either, so there seems to be no possibility of doing something with an historic building that is important to the town.

**Robin Harper:** Does the member agree that, if we had land value taxation and a cadastral register of properties throughout Scotland, it would be fairly easy to trace the owner of the property?

**Dr Murray:** I take the point on board, although that is not necessarily the only way of addressing the problem. However, methods of addressing the problem must be found.

A second brief example is the little street in which my constituency office is situated, which is called Friars Vennel. It is an ancient street that used to lead from the monastery up to the town, which is why it has its name, and which has associations with the Covenanters and other historic associations. At one time, it was a thriving

business area, but it fell on hard times. Because of the development of the High Street and the Loreburn shopping centre, the shops and small businesses in Friars Vennel no longer had passing visitors on the main shopping trail. Despite that, local businesses and the council have made efforts to renovate the street and bring back its historic character. However, those efforts are being severely hampered by the owners of four derelict buildings. The buildings are not particularly important historically, but as they are not being looked after the historic environment is being brought down.

In that second case, we know who the owners are; they have simply failed to invest in the buildings over the years. During the recent heavy snowfall, one of the buildings collapsed and is now lying by the side of the street, looking rather sad. Despite all the efforts of everyone who wants to bring up the street to the appropriate standard, it is impossible for the council to do anything about the situation. I would like there to be increased powers—possibly through planning regulations—for councils to compulsorily purchase such buildings for the value of the property less the amount that they would have to spend to get them into a suitable condition to either use or resell.

I wonder whether the Executive has given any consideration to streamlining the compulsory purchase process to enable councils to take on board derelict properties and do something with them. Such buildings are an absolute blight, not just on Dumfries but on other places in my constituency and around Scotland. If we could do something about that, we would be doing something for our nation's historic environment.

16:15

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I congratulate Dave Petrie on his maiden speech, particularly as he gave me a name check. I advise him that that was no baptism of fire—that awaits him—but me being nice.

I love gardens—large, small or old. I particularly love the gardens at Benmore on the Dunoon peninsula; for information, I advise Robin Harper and Donald Gorrie that there are many spectacular trees there.

The fine art degree that I acquired in the past has given me a love of ancient buildings. I very much subscribe to the statement in paragraph 3.1 of SHEP 1:

“People want to see the historic environment protected, cared for and used sustainably”.

I am interested in the phrase “used sustainably”. Against the backdrop of the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill that is before Parliament, I shall give three examples in which sustainable use could be, but is not, being implemented.

In the Borders, there is the old government building in Galashiels. It is not the most spectacularly bonnie of buildings, but it has a history. It is under threat of demolition for the expansion of Tesco—I will not begin Tesco-beating in the chamber. The building is on the site of an old mill and the first Scottish College of Textiles was situated there. There is potential for the building to be adapted into a tourist information centre. It is close to the Galashiels bus station and it will hopefully be close to a stop for the railway line. There is room for compromise with Tesco on that site—I believe that the council is endeavouring to come to such a compromise.

That is an example of what Elaine Murray referred to as sympathetic adaptation, for which some buildings are suitable and some are not. It has happened in other parts of the Borders. Along the River Tweed, what once were mills are now occupied enterprise areas. I hope that the minister will consider those aspects.

I understand that the issue is a legal one. At one time, that building could have been listed, although whether it would have been listed is another matter. That opportunity was missed and now, as the subject of a live planning application, the building can no longer be listed. It is my understanding that in England an application can be made for listing, irrespective of whether there is a live planning application. Will the minister consider that? I would not call it a lacuna in the law, but there is a discrepancy and England is ahead of us in that regard. That is an issue to be taken up.

Secondly, my colleague Michael Matheson referred to Abbotsford House, although it was not him who said that the situation with that building is “critical”. That word was used by the current administrator, Jacquie Wright—I believe that she is seconded from the National Trust for Scotland—who said:

“If we don't find a partner and the money, I am afraid that the money will gradually run out. It is critical.”

What we do not want to see happening to Abbotsford House is what happened to Burns cottage in Alloway, which I visited many years ago. It was pouring with rain and I saw historic manuscripts by Robert Burns that were exposed to damp conditions.

Alarm bells went off and that situation has been dealt with; however, I do not want to see that happening to Abbotsford House, which is quirky, eclectic and personal, and therefore very moving. It belonged to a man who, I am delighted to say, loved clutter as much as I do, although his clutter—from the library that the Faculty of Advocates has resting there to all those armoury artefacts—is much more valuable. In the quasi-

medieval hall, I was delighted to see the Grahame coat of arms—spelled properly with an “e” at the end—right next to the Scott coat of arms. Perhaps that was portentous: a unionist and a nationalist who recognise a common cause.

I do not wish to make light of Abbotsford, because it is an example of a building that is not just of Borders importance or Scottish importance but of international importance, as was Burns cottage. We have been very casual about the history of our buildings, our writers and our dramatists because we have so many of them. Were we American, no doubt our approach would be different.

Finally, I want to mention the racecourse at Musselburgh, which, as the minister is aware, is wrapped around one of our earliest golf courses. Given my history with regard to sport, I am not sure that I should be talking about golf in the chamber, but I can point out that there was a links in that place in 1672. Indeed, it is alleged that Mary Queen of Scots played golf there. There is an old pub on the site—I think that it is called Mrs Foreman’s inn—that used to pass drinks to golfers out of its side window. However, this strange little place that has evolved over time—along with the wildlife lagoon right next to it—is now to have floodlights and a multipurpose sports stadium. Good grief—the heart sinks at the proposal.

A community campaign has been launched to prevent the development and a petition was presented to the Scottish Parliament. As usual, the petition wended its way to a committee of the Parliament—in this case, the Communities Committee—and was parked. I believe that the application might have been called in by the minister, but the point is that too many such things are going on in Scotland. Communities are forming groups all over the place to wage little fights to protect historical sites and buildings that are self-evidently worth while.

We must start to be tougher in our support for those sites and buildings. I take on board the point that Ted Brocklebank and Roseanna Cunningham made about the fact that, often, the buildings that we are concerned about are in the hands of private families who will not do anything or cannot afford to do anything. Of course, the Burns cottage and Abbotsford are in the hands of trusts. I do not want to criticise those trusts or those owners, but time is of the essence in those situations and urgent action is needed before we reach the point at which we are merely making buildings wind and watertight. Abbotsford has not yet reached that stage—some money has been secured to deal with immediate issues—but it is time for a greater sense of urgency.

The minister has lots of places to go to, so I will not invite her to make any further visits. If she

would just name one or two places that she intends to visit, I would be grateful.

16:22

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie)**  
**(Lab):** I apologise for not being present at the start of the debate. I was speaking to a school party from St Columba’s high school, which is in my constituency.

I draw members’ attention to my entry in the register of members’ interests, which states that I am a member of the cross-party group on architecture and the built environment. I was its first convener and have been ably succeeded by Robin Harper. Further, in 1999, I headed up the year of architecture and design in Glasgow. One of the glories of that year was the creation of the Lighthouse, the Charles Rennie Mackintosh-designed building that was once home to the *Glasgow Herald* and which has been transformed into Scotland’s architecture centre. That has been a tremendous international success and has been looked at by people from across the world. Last week, I was there to speak to people from Bradford who had come up to Glasgow to see how it is possible to emphasise the benefits of a city’s urban history and architecture as a source of regeneration.

I want to talk about how we can look at what has been left to us from the past, not only as historical artefacts but as things that can provide an extremely valuable anchor for the future and represent marks of continuity between the past and the future. We have to pay particular attention to that. Scotland has a rich history but we want to have a rich future as well. One of the most valuable things that we can do is to bring together past architecture and artefacts in a way that enables us to make them part of the way in which we design things for the future.

Scotland has two great advantages in its historic environment. The first, which has been talked about most by members, is Scotland’s fantastic landscape and the way in which buildings fit into it, whether they are castles or other historic buildings of one kind or another. The second, to which we should pay equal attention, is the legacy of urban and industrial history, which is probably most marked in Glasgow and Edinburgh. John Betjeman said that Glasgow was the finest Victorian city in the world. The shape of the buildings above the shop fronts displays fantastic richness and architectural quality, which is one of the many reasons why people come to Glasgow. Edinburgh, too, has its own great architectural heritage.

We need to look beyond our great cities, however. I will focus on my constituency. In the

past, 20 or 30 years ago, our industrial and urban history was all too often swept away in the process of renewal. That happened in Glasgow, where buildings were torn down that should not have been torn down. There are also buildings in Glasgow even now that are relatively neglected, such as the Greek Thomson churches, especially the one in Caledonia Road, which I believe is a unique example of a high-quality building to which we should pay particular attention.

In Clydebank, we had the largest factory in Europe, which had its own monument in the Singer clock. That was simply torn down and taken away. I am determined that the other class A-listed monument in Clydebank, the Titan crane, should be preserved and protected in the context of a major renewal and renovation of Clydebank. Clydebank is where the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth were built, along with a huge number of other great ships, and the area has a strong historical tradition of shipbuilding. All that we have left on the site of John Brown's is the Titan crane. It is vital for Clydebank's and Scotland's industrial history that that monument is maintained and made accessible.

Unless the people of Clydebank worked in the shipyard, they had no access to the waterfront, as the shipyard presented a barrier between the people and the river. Now that the shipyard is gone, I want people to be able to walk down to the waterfront and take the lift up the Titan crane; I want the crane to be lit up, so that the first thing that people who come into Scotland via Glasgow airport will see is the Titan crane, the great marker of the shipbuilding heritage in Clydebank and the west of Scotland. There are fantastic plans to do that and the work is under way. I hope that the minister will be part of its launch. That is another invitation to the minister, but one that I hope she will be especially pleased to take up.

Another thing that is unique about my constituency is the fact that it is the transition point between Loch Katrine and Glasgow for the world's first and most significant process of delivering public water and improving health. Milngavie reservoir is not only a beautiful place that attracts a huge number of visitors, which is one reason why it should be preserved; it is also one of Scotland's most important industrial sites. It is certainly one of our most historic and significant industrial sites, and it is in a good state of preservation. I want to ensure that, when Scottish Water finishes building its new water treatment plant—which will be a bit unsightly, although it is hoped that it can be covered up in various ways—the bits of architecture that are left are blended into the landscape of Milngavie. The reservoir is one of the most visited green spaces in the west of Scotland, and I want it to be maintained, protected and preserved not just for the people of Milngavie,

but for the people of the west of Scotland who visit it. I hope that I can encourage the minister to work with me alongside Scottish Water, the council and the individual constituents who are trying to set up a trust to protect the reservoir.

The minister has done the right thing with her culture brief by saying that we have to identify what is best and important, and to focus attention and, to some extent, resources on that. Hard decisions have had to be made and the minister and the Scottish Arts Council have generally made the right ones. I suspect that the same thing will have to happen with historical architecture and I hope that we can focus on what is important and what most needs to be protected.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We are now very tight for time so I will have to enforce the advised time limits.

16:30

**Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** The debate has been fascinating and very enjoyable.

Euan Robson and I have the great pleasure of living in the Borders, an area that is rich in history, natural beauty and a real sense of community. The communities themselves will celebrate all their history during the common ridings season, in which we will also be proud participants and which other members, including the former minister Frank McAveety, have attended on their holidays.

I, too, congratulate Mr Petrie on his maiden speech. In my maiden speech, I said that I was proud to be a standard bearer in Parliament for my constituency. During the braw lads gathering, the local standard bearers and cornets will lead rideouts over the flats and hills of the Borders. They will also ride to historic landmarks of the built environment, including, of course, the former home of Walter Scott, Abbotsford. Sites across the Borders that locals and tourists enjoy and admire are places where close contact can be made with history. By visiting them, people can feel that they are in touch with the past, from distant prehistory to events and people within living memory. Euan Robson gave the examples of Steve Hislop, Jim Clark—a great favourite of my dad's—and Jimmy Guthrie.

Each building is a still frame of our past. It captures with it the cultural significance of previous communities. The breadth of history in my constituency is truly exciting, from the grave in Milton Bridge that was raided by Burke and Hare, to Robert the Bruce's heart, which was buried at Melrose abbey, making a strange bedfellow for the bagpiping pig—I recommend Melrose abbey to members who have not seen it.

Any policy that encompasses the breadth of the built environment in Scotland has to be flexible. The principles of transparency and accountability that the minister said run through the SHEPs are very welcome indeed. However, I am afraid that, in my constituency in recent years, the operation of listings and other activities of Historic Scotland have not been consistent with those principles. The Edwardian building that housed the Scottish College of Textiles in Galashiels and which became government buildings is to be bulldozed for an enlarged Tesco car park. An attempt to list it was made only after intervention by the minister's predecessor, following a planning application. The legal judgment was that listing could not be sustained and had to be withdrawn.

Other major developments in Galashiels will change the town considerably. Although economic growth is vital for the area, we must not lose the very essence of the special towns and communities that make the Borders what it is. If that means giving greater consideration to our small towns and market towns in the context of proper investment, to ensure that they are cherished, it will be important to co-ordinate with the Development Department.

I was particularly disappointed that the listings for Galashiels were not revised and completed before the controversy over the government buildings. Without up-to-date and proactive listings procedures, I fear that such a situation might well happen again and that other buildings could fall through the net.

When I attended the funeral of Dame Jean Maxwell-Scott, the final direct descendant of Sir Walter, there was concern about the future of Abbotsford. However, I was not entirely sure what Mr Matheson was referring to when he mentioned the campaign to save it. I am delighted that he and Ms Grahame are adding to the number of day visitors to the Borders, to which Euan Robson referred in his speech.

When Sir Walter Scott purchased a farmhouse on the banks of the Tweed, it had the

"unharmonious designation of Clarty Hole".

Abbotsford was the Borders' single biggest tourist attraction and it can be again. After discussions involving local groups and enthusiasts, the national galleries and others, there is real potential for a very exciting future for this great resource. I will continue to work constructively with those potential partners, because the prize is very great.

I am proud to have other prizes in my constituency. Those range from the kirk of the forest, usually identified as Selkirk parish church, where Wallace was proclaimed guardian of the realm—in the name of the French noble John de Ballieul, interestingly—to the ancient forts,

battlefields and settlements of the Eildons. We also have Lauder's unique burgess acres, which are a remarkable survival of the pre-enclosure open-field system and are in operation to this day. My constituency is also peppered with peel towers, such as the stunning Neidpath Castle, which protects Peebles at Neidpath gorge. However, seeking to protect our historic environment is obviously not a new thing, given that—Robin Harper might appreciate this—William Wordsworth decried the felling of trees at Neidpath at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As the burgess acres in Lauder and the common ridings demonstrate, in the Borders we live our history. I was born at the mouth of the River Tweed and I now represent the people who live at its source. To follow the route of that magical and mighty river and pay recognition to its proud tributaries is to discover not only the region's history—which in many cases traces the country's violent past—but our economic heritage, especially in textiles. I live in a quarter of a former mill owner's house and, like others who live in older buildings, delight in its history. If visitors stop at all the schools on the way, they will see kids preparing to take part in this year's common ridings and festivals, which range from the salmon queen in Berwick to the Beltane queen in Peebles.

I will finish on that point. Ultimately, our buildings, monuments and historic houses must be visited but our cultural history must be lived.

16:36

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians)**

**(Con):** Any interests that I have in ancient buildings are declared in the register of members' interests. I am a trustee of the Lennoxlove Trust and the Lennoxlove Maintenance Fund Settlement Trust. I am also a director of Lennoxlove House Limited, but I undertake all those interests in a voluntary, unpaid capacity.

In this broad-ranging debate, a theme that has been adopted by many members is that the minister should look sympathetically at the case for Abbotsford House, especially if a viable solution is put forward. No one suggests that a solution will be easy, but the house is obviously extremely important for Scotland's heritage, not just because Sir Walter wrote a great many books that are renowned throughout the world, but because he rediscovered Scotland's Crown jewels.

I want to thank Historic Scotland's chief executive for his letter to me following the debate on the role that volunteers from Linlithgow primary school have played at Linlithgow Palace. He was anxious to confirm that hundreds of thousands of pounds—more than £300,000—has been spent on

the palace. My only request to the minister is to consider whether the palace's great hall might be reroofed after proper consultation with local interests, including the community councils, to see whether that would be in the best interests of Linlithgow. Although such a proposition may be for the long term, I believe that it is worthy of consideration.

Historic buildings make a fundamental contribution to the historic appeal of our nation. One such building, which happens not to come under Historic Scotland's jurisdiction, is Queensberry House. Before long, this building in which we work will become one of the wonders of Scotland, as it has attracted approaching 1 million visitors and secured eight architectural awards, two of which are of great international significance.

There are three key reasons why our historic buildings, parklands and gardens should be preserved. First, they make an enormous difference to tourism in Scotland, which is an important and lucrative industry. Historic Scotland's work maximises the opportunities to promote Scotland as a tourist destination. Secondly, conserved historic buildings—in my view, Donald Gorrie was absolutely right to recommend grants to churches—can provide an important focus for wider regeneration schemes. In five of Scotland's cities, city heritage trusts contribute to that process. Thirdly, the care and maintenance of our historic environment is a major factor in providing jobs in our construction industry. In that context, the inventory of gardens and designed landscapes, which Historic Scotland has played a large part in establishing, is welcome.

Perhaps the most important aspect of our living history is its value in inspiring and educating young people. Historic Scotland helps to welcome some 650,000 schoolchildren each year who take part in free educational visits to promote the historic environment.

I hope that I may be allowed to recount my most embarrassing episode as a member of the Scottish Parliament, which involved Historic Scotland. The late Donald Dewar invited me to welcome a delegation from the Nepalese Parliament to Edinburgh Castle for lunch. When I arrived half an hour early, to my dismay the caterers had not turned up. When the bus arrived with the parliamentary delegation, I mentioned to its members that their visit would be incomplete without seeing the Crown jewels of Scotland, which Sir Walter Scott had rediscovered. Historic Scotland had laid on a completely new presentation that was so fascinating that it was a considerable time before we re-emerged into the sunlight. By that time, to my intense relief, the caterers had arrived.

It is appropriate for me to wish the Nepalese Parliament well with its restoration and every success in the future. In the same way, I wish the minister well with restoration and conservation of buildings. My friend Ted Brocklebank mentioned that restoration is as important as conservation. I will give an example that is either in the minister's constituency or next door to it. I refer to Spiers wharf, which consisted of deserted warehouse buildings that were completely empty and which were renewed by Historic Scotland, or its predecessor body, and various other agencies. I believe that that work has made a great contribution to Glasgow. Des McNulty was absolutely right to argue that Historic Scotland can be an anchor for the nation and that our industrial heritage should be noticed and properly conserved. The City Chambers in Glasgow is one of the finest buildings to be found anywhere in the world.

This has been an extremely successful debate. I wish the minister success—I am sure that it will come her way.

16:42

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):**

In this most interesting debate about the roots of our national and historic environment, we have concentrated a great deal on buildings, although not entirely to the detriment of rural areas and the countryside. If I may sum up the debate simply, many members have expressed the concern that Historic Scotland has a massive task and that there does not seem to be enough money for it to do it. If we want to renovate buildings, we must decide what priority that should have in Government funding. Obviously, we have to take from one thing to give to another—it is not an easy equation. This afternoon, no one is saying that there is an easy way of solving the problem. However, far too many members mentioned the fact that we find ourselves with a listing process that is inconsistent. It was interesting that Christine Grahame referred to the government buildings in Gala and their previous use. She also made the case for Abbotsford, which was enhanced to some extent by Jeremy Purvis. That set of listings was problematic. It seems that again and again we lose buildings because the process is not streamlined.

As a practising historian, I have been concerned for many years about the way in which our historic environment is interpreted. It is easy for me to explain my concerns with reference to a place that has not been mentioned so far. There is a Scottish Natural Heritage reserve at Loch Kinord in Deeside. It has an excellent display, explanation board and car park at the Burn o' Vat. At that very place, there was a major battle in Scottish

history—the battle of Culblean on St Andrew's day in 1335—but the SNH material says nothing about that human activity. Some 50 years ago, a plaque was erected on a huge granite boulder about half a mile along the road, but the two things are not married. As the minister said, we must get some of our unique resources working together. She also mentioned the need for regional and national Government to work together on such matters.

Another important site is the land where the Falkirk tryst, the great cattle sales in Falkirk, took place. Thankfully, some of the grounds still exist because they are on a golf course, but the fact that there is not a built environment on the land makes it more difficult to interpret. Part of that land, on which major events took place for more than a century, has been sold for housing. However, I am glad to say that Falkirk Council, which Michael Matheson knows well, has refused to consider housing proposals for sites that are on the golf course, despite the golf club being interested in trying to capitalise on the land. The council has recognised the recreational and historic value of the site. That is an example of local government applying itself to maintain a site that is part of our folklore.

Several members, including Donald Gorrie and Robin Harper, have mentioned historic trees. A register of trees in the Planning etc (Scotland) Bill would be very useful. One such tree, which is illustrated elsewhere in the Parliament building, is an ancient, gnarled Spanish chestnut on Inchmahome, on the Lake of Menteith. That is the very place where Robert Cunninghame Graham and his wife are buried. Robert Cunninghame Graham wrote about the Falkirk tryst. He was also one of the founders of the Scottish Labour Party and the Scottish National Party. The tree on that island is one of the most beautiful spots in central Scotland. Some people visit it, but not enough people realise that in its natural setting such a fabulous ancient tree matters more than just the people. It would be helpful if something were done to recognise ancient trees.

A lot of the historic landscape is also a working landscape, such as the crofting landscape of my own part of the world. It has been said that the stone walls in the north-east of Scotland are a testament to near slavery, but they are part of a landscape that has been created by working people, and the land is still worked to this day. We must find ways to encourage the redevelopment of such places of interest through the rural development plan, which we discussed this morning, and through Historic Scotland taking an interest in many of the basic buildings that are used by ordinary people.

There is a massive emphasis on public buildings, the large houses of the gentry and so

on. Those buildings are all unique, but the minister was correct to recognise that, as Des McNulty pointed out, excellence is an important element when we consider what should be allocated priority and money. It concerns me that we continually spend money on properties that, although unique, are not of particular historic value beyond the fact that a dusty history book mentions that some laird or whatever stayed in them at some point. We must make choices.

Elaine Murray mentioned the desperate need to establish who owns derelict properties in our towns and in the countryside. I share Robin Harper's view that we ought to use fiscal means, such as a land value tax, to get derelict buildings used or into the hands of people who will use them.

There is far too much to cover in the short time that I have, but I wanted to mention some of those examples, because they add to the colourful picture that we can build on in Scotland. Historic Scotland has been given a new plan, but I hope that the minister can assure us that more resources will be made available and that its activities will be prioritised to ensure that many more people in the country can enjoy the historic environment. Many members have given good examples of that environment from their constituencies.

16:49

**Patricia Ferguson:** The debate has been stimulating. Members have spoken passionately about situations, buildings and landscapes in their constituencies. That shows the swathe of heritage that exists across our nation. I suspect that I will not have enough time to mention all the issues that members have raised, but if I miss out any that members particularly want to raise with me, they can do so either this afternoon or in writing at a later date.

I will begin at the beginning by addressing Michael Matheson's speech, in which he made some interesting points. I reassure him that Historic Scotland works very much in partnership with other organisations that have an interest in the field and with those that may not be so obviously connected. Policy integration is at the heart of what the Executive is trying to do. I refer the member to Malcolm Chisholm's recent statement on regeneration, in which he talked about culture and the importance of the kind of debate that we have had this afternoon.

Michael Matheson was right to highlight the Antonine wall, which is an example of international partnership. Historic Scotland has joined up with other similar organisations—literally around the world—to make an application for world heritage



site status. The application that is going ahead is not only for the frontier that happens to be in our country but for the frontiers of the Roman world. That sort of initiative gives enormous hope for what we are trying to do; it is also a wonderful tool for educating our young people.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** Will the minister give way?

**Patricia Ferguson:** I have a lot to get through, but I will try to come to some of the points that the member made.

Although there is at least one element of Mr Brocklebank's speech on which I will not comment, I will address the point he made that Historic Scotland cannot force owners to repair listed buildings, which was a matter that other members also mentioned. At the moment, local authorities have fairly extensive powers to require owners to repair listed buildings. However, we have tasked the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland to review the current legislation. I look forward to receiving its report later this year, which will help to guide our future work. Historic Scotland fully funds, and has always funded, the buildings at risk register. It tries to bring together owners and sustainable solutions. Again, many of the solutions are developed through the historic grants system.

Mr Brocklebank also mentioned Castle Tioram. I have taken a great deal of interest in the issue during the time that I have been in this post. I say to him that it is not all doom and gloom. After discussions with the owner, and with his agreement, Historic Scotland has recently commissioned a study of the architectural history of the site. Historic Scotland is pleased to have established a constructive dialogue with the owner and his agents through that study. I understand that a site meeting is taking place today, with all parties in attendance. Hopefully, we will see some progress.

Donald Gorrie rightly said that we need to raise the profile of our historic environment, particularly in terms of its importance. I hope that today's debate has done that. I want to reassure him on the issue of ecclesiastical buildings. As someone who lived for many years in part of a grade A church, I feel quite passionately on the subject. Appropriate other uses can be found for such buildings, but it needs to be done in a sympathetic way. That work often needs the partnership-type working that all of us want to see. Historic Scotland is taking part in a conference in Govan tomorrow on that very issue. I am sure that Donald Gorrie will watch that with great interest.

Roseanna Cunningham raised a number of issues and did so graphically. She also mentioned a number of very interesting places in her

constituency. Indeed, she made the good point that money is not always the issue. I point out to her that grant-in-aid from Historic Scotland in 2005-06 came to more than £13 million, compared with about £11.5 million in 2004-05. In talking about the grant-in-aid that Historic Scotland gives out, the important thing to say is that the money is often used in partnership with money that other organisations contribute. Historic Scotland is therefore able to lever in a great deal of additional money.

As other members have done, I congratulate David Petrie on his maiden speech. It is always good to hear a maiden speech on a subject about which the member cares deeply. In his speech this afternoon, Mr Petrie showed that he cares deeply about this issue. I have to say to him that I do not agree with all the points that he made. For his sake, I fervently hope that my colleague Karen Whitefield was not listening to the comment that he made about his baptism of fire.

In my remarks to Mr Brocklebank, I mentioned the report that is coming to us from HEACS. As I said, the council is examining for us any legislative changes that may be necessary for our historic environment. Our intention is not to complicate matters; in fact, we want to streamline the system and reduce the possibility of complication. I entirely take the point that Mr Petrie made on the subject.

Euan Robson raised several local issues about which he was concerned. Although museums are not really part of today's debate, I have an interest in them and I suggest to him that he might wish to speak to the Scottish Museums Council about what funding might be available. Later this year, the museums recognition scheme will come into play and that might be of assistance to him.

As regards the paintings in our national and other collections that are sometimes in storage, last year there was the welcome move to Kirkcudbright of some works from the impressionists collection that is held by Glasgow. That was an extremely successful venture that will be replicated to some extent by some of the partnership working that is developing for next year's year of highland culture.

Christine Grahame mentioned a particular issue in her constituency. Although it would be inappropriate for me to comment on it or on any other individual case, I point out that she might refer to the SHEP document on listing in order to advance her case and I encourage all members to participate in that way.

I have taken a keen interest in Abbotsford and we appreciate the importance of the house to the nation's heritage. Historic Scotland will continue to work with organisations such as Scottish Borders

Council, Scottish Enterprise and VisitScotland to ensure that its potential is recognised and developed. Historic Scotland is currently grant aiding further repairs to the house with the National Trust for Scotland supporting its running until a long-term management plan is established. Although the long-term future of the estate rests largely in the hands of the executors, if other relevant agencies work well together, Abbotsford's future can be secured. I am happy to consider views if, for example, the National Trust for Scotland thinks that more needs to be done.

Earlier this afternoon, I described the historic environment as an asset, particularly for tourism and education. Last week, Historic Scotland announced that its free weekend over 1 and 2 April, when everyone can access its 74 properties for which there is normally a charge, attracted 103,000 people. That is more than double the number in 2005. Historic Scotland also welcomed around 3,500 new adult and child members to its membership scheme. That shows that many in our country share our aspirations.

I stressed today that we have inherited the investment of many past generations. That is a legacy that we are determined to pass on, fit for use, to the future. Caring for that legacy is the most sustainable thing that we can do—it does not get greener than reusing old buildings. Let us look at some hard examples. There are well over 2.5 million dwellings in Scotland, some of which are of great historical interest and many others of which are of value as part of interesting and characterful townscapes. Many provide comfortable homes with spacious and flexible accommodation.

Think about the energy and resources invested in those thousands of homes: the labour of men and women; natural resources extracted from the earth; and private and public money spent. Think how irresponsible it would be to throw away that investment: the work; the resources; the money; the energy; and the character. Think how irresponsible it would be to cause the waste and pollution inherent in demolition, if we do not have to do it. Think how irresponsible it would be to put the demolished material in landfill, if we do not have to do it. Think how irresponsible it would be to quarry and transport new materials, if we do not have to do it. We cannot and should not always protect or conserve every part of our historic environment, but our decisions must be responsible and well informed and take the long-term view.

The historic environment reflects the inclusivity of Scotland and the rich variation between the regions. From prehistory onwards, the styles of stone circles, houses, castles and farms reflect the different ways that people did things and how they thought about the world. That should make us

think about our varied origins as a people. We are and always have been a mixed lot.

Those and other issues are what our new Scottish historic environment policy series is all about. It sets a framework for us all to manage our rich historic environment. Our historic environment is a wonderful asset, not just for us but for our shared future.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate and brings us to 5 o'clock, when we would normally have decision time. However, I have to tell members that there are no decisions to be made.

## Wanlockhead Museum Trust and Museum of Lead Mining

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-3933, in the name of Alasdair Morgan, on Wanlockhead Museum Trust and Museum of Lead Mining.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that 2006 is the 250th anniversary of the founding of Wanlockhead Miners' Library, established by the lead miners as part of their educational and cultural activity and now under the care of the Wanlockhead Museum Trust; recognises that the award-winning museum itself is a unique monument to industrial workers in the Lowther Hills, as well as being a valuable economic asset to today's economy, and believes that the Scottish Executive should act to ensure that arrangements are in place so that the museum's trustees can plan for the future with some degree of certainty instead of encountering the intermittent financial uncertainty which, on occasion, threatens the very existence of the museum.

17:02

**Alasdair Morgan (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I apologise to the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport for keeping her here after the long debate that she has already endured.

It is with great pleasure that I open this debate on the future of the Wanlockhead Museum of Lead Mining and its associated miners' library. However, time will allow me only to skim over the various issues.

Wanlockhead, as members know, is the highest village in Scotland. It is very privileged to host the mining museum, which preserves the industrial area of the villages of Wanlockhead and Leadhills on both sides of the county march of Dumfriesshire and Lanarkshire.

The Wanlockhead area is a mineralogical site of international importance. Seven of the 700 or so known minerals were first discovered in the area and lead mining was carried out there at least as early as 900 AD. Silver and gold mining were also important in the area; indeed, the gold that adorns the parliamentary mace was donated by gold panners working in Wanlockhead.

Geology apart, the village is also notable for having Europe's second-oldest workers' subscription library, which was founded in 1756. Lead miners of the period paid a small subscription to assemble a collection of books to improve their own and their families' education. In fact, education always played a significant role in the development of Wanlockhead. On her trip round Scotland in 1803, Dorothy Wordsworth commented that the children of lead miners from

the village were studying Greek and Latin at the local school.

However, because of changing economics, lead mining has long since ceased to be a viable industrial activity. Such was the decline that in the 1960s, when only 30 or so residents remained in Wanlockhead—most of them in houses in very poor condition—the local council of the time suggested that it might prefer to evacuate the village and have the remaining houses demolished.

Fortunately, that proposal, which would have led to the mainland equivalent of the evacuation of St Kilda, did not go ahead. The village now has a much higher population, who live in more modern houses, and Wanlockhead Museum Trust's activities have contributed to economic regeneration and provide valuable employment in a part of the country where jobs are very hard to come by.

In addition to the superb display of minerals that one can see in the museum, the facilities have been expanded over the years to include the refurbished lending library; a row of restored houses, which is used to portray miners' lives in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; access to one of the former lead mines; and the opportunity to participate in gold panning activity.

The museum has attracted several awards, notably one from the Gulbenkian Trust. It is a VisitScotland four-star attraction, is Investors in People accredited and has recently become the first independent museum to get museum accreditation to Museums, Libraries and Archives Council standards.

Despite that, the museum has regularly been struggling as the end of each financial year approaches. The museum closes during the winter months, because even global warming has not yet made Wanlockhead an all-year-round attraction, but the 18 or so temporary staff—there is one permanent staff member—usually commence work in the latter part of March in preparation for the April weekends, which are often the busiest of the entire season. However, the current imbalance between revenue and expenditure means that, even with an overdraft facility, the trust can run out of cash prior to the commencement of each new season. With each successive year, the date at which that happens tends to come earlier and earlier.

This year, cash ran out in January and the situation was such that, along with certain delays in finalising the next year's payment that the museum was going to get from Dumfries and Galloway Council, the management of the museum could have no certainty that there would be money available to pay staff wages when the

museum reopened for the new season. Such was the dedication of the staff that, when the situation was explained to them, they volunteered to work initially without payment until the situation could be resolved. Fortunately, the funding stream from the council became available at the last minute, but the problem is that next year the pressure will be even greater.

Dumfries and Galloway Council has been generous in its on-going support for the museum project and I am in no way critical of what it has done. Indeed, it has now committed to funding the museum over three years, albeit at a real-terms reducing rate. It has never committed to funding the museum's revenue shortfall in its entirety, nor do I think that it should, because surely Wanlockhead is much more than simply a local visitor attraction. It is a site and a museum of national significance within Scotland and as such it deserves to get a firm commitment—whatever that commitment might be—from the Executive, to allow it to plan with certainty for the future. I would argue that that commitment should be such as to allow the museum to employ both the professional curator and the education officer that it desperately needs. It is simply not good enough that the operation of that important part of our tourism industry and of our cultural heritage should depend on the good will of trustees and on underpaid staff who are willing to work without wages.

If one were to evaluate Wanlockhead Museum of Lead Mining on a purely financial basis, it would clearly have to close. What the Executive has to decide is whether it has any interest in retaining the existence of the project or whether it wishes to wash its hands of its responsibility. As I said, the museum has elements of national significance. Ironically, the part of the museum that houses the collection of the greatest national significance, namely the library, is the least popular part of the museum with visitors. However, if the museum did not exist, at the very least the library's collection would have to be preserved by the state and would presumably moulder in some basement of the National Library of Scotland.

In September 2000, in answer to a question, the then Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport, Rhona Brankin, said:

"we announced in the National Cultural Strategy a national audit of museum collections to inform the development of criteria for a restructuring of the sector, with the aim of establishing a sustainable funding framework for the future."—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 28 September 2000; Vol 8, p 191.]

Currently, almost six years on, the Scottish Museums Council, on behalf of the Executive, is developing a significance scheme to allow the channelling of national funds to those museums that have some national significance. However,

even that is not likely to be ready until sometime next year at the earliest, and experience tells us that decisions on allocation of funding will take even longer. The trustees of the museum have some justification in wondering how much longer they must wait for decisions to be taken. I look forward, as they will, to the minister's reply.

17:09

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con):** I sincerely thank Alasdair Morgan for bringing the subject forward for debate. Not many people believe that Wanlockhead is in the constituency of Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, but it is and the constituency is all the better for its presence.

Anybody who has been to the Wanlockhead Museum of Lead Mining would agree that it is unique. One only has to visit to appreciate that uniqueness, and I repeat the invitation that I first issued to the minister following her announcement on the national cultural strategy to visit the place when she can possibly find room in her diary to do so. As well as having a fascinating visit to an unforgettable monument to the incredibly hardy souls who carved their living from the hillsides, she will see some superbly tended moorland and, as Alasdair Morgan rightly pointed out, the waters whence came the gold that is inset into the head of our mace in the Parliament.

I completely endorse the content of Alasdair Morgan's speech and there is no need for me to repeat it, however worthy it is to repeat wise words. The amount of money that the trustees need to maintain the viability of the unique attraction at Wanlockhead is peanuts compared with expenditure on other museums and other measures that are taken in the cultural world. For once, I do not accuse Dumfries and Galloway Council of doing anything other than its utmost to support an attraction that is within its boundaries. However, it cannot be right that, in 2001—the year of foot-and-mouth disease—the museum was dependent on a well-wisher's donation of £25,000 to keep it going. Neither can it be right that, this year, the staff volunteered to work for nothing—which says an enormous amount about their commitment to the museum and how the trustees run it—nor that yet again, before Dumfries and Galloway Council was able to make a grant available, a benefactor had to lend the trustees £20,000 to allow wages to be paid and the museum to open.

It is surely more than ironic that this debate follows this afternoon's debate on our historic environment, but that simply highlights the tragedy this year when the museum's book and exhibition funds, which the trustees had painstakingly built up, were wiped out by the necessity to prevent the

historic environment of Wanlockhead from falling into disrepair through damp and environmental damage. That is the level of the tightrope on which the trustees walk, and it is a national disgrace that that is the case, as the unique nature of Wanlockhead allows the visitor to experience the reality of lead mining and the horrendous conditions with which most of the miners put up in the exact location and context within which the mining took place. It is not only important for tourists but a vital component of our children's education about Scotland's cultural and social past. My colleague Murray Tosh will expand on that education experience.

Rather than repeat the many good points that Alasdair Morgan made, I will quote a letter from a Dr James Begg to *The Herald* last autumn. He said:

"I was disturbed by a *Herald* article several weeks ago on the threat to the Wanlockhead Lead Mine Museum, and deeply dismayed by today's news of its imminent closure if the paltry sum of £20,000 cannot be found to keep it running through the winter—and of the failure of the Scottish Executive to offer any assistance.

This museum is not just 'an old building stuffed full of dusty exhibits'. It is a living museum with eighteenth and nineteenth-century miners' cottages, unique machinery, and an opportunity for visitors to don hard hats and penetrate deep into the hillside through the narrow workings of an old lead mine, giving a wonderful insight into the appalling conditions in which men, women and children had to toil 200 years ago, high in the Leadhills.

I write this with feeling, as someone whose great-great-grandfather worked in these mines in the early 1800s—and someone who has brought enthralled overseas visitors to this magical spot high in the heart of the Lowther Hills. I find it inconceivable that ... there is not a spare £20,000 lying around which could be donated without pain to save the Scottish Museum of Lead Mining—and the local community. And perhaps there might even be a wee bit extra, to promote and publicise more widely what has unfortunately ... been one of Scotland's best-kept secrets!"

Following the minister's statement on the cultural strategy, I wrote to her and she advised that the museum may apply under the museums recognition scheme, which will be rolled out later this year. I hope that, tonight, she does not simply hide behind that possibility but will take the opportunity of the debate to make a significant first step in changing Wanlockhead from one of Scotland's best-kept secrets—as revealed in that letter—to one of the jewels in Scotland's crown, which it undoubtedly deserves to be.

17:15

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** I congratulate Alasdair Morgan on having his motion accepted for debate. I apologise for not having signed it, although I thought that I had done. I am sure that my Dumfries and Galloway Council colleague, Jim Dempster, will take me to

task for that oversight. Like many others who have represented the area, he is extremely and rightly proud of the excellent visitor attraction in his ward.

As Alex Fergusson said, we have just been discussing the Scottish historic environment policy. SHEP 1 refers to Scotland's industrial heritage, specifically to the Verdant Works in Dundee. I am particularly delighted to see the recognition of the importance of our industrial heritage in that policy document. I do not think that it can be overemphasised. Industrial museums such as the Museum of Lead Mining at Wanlockhead, the Verdant Works in Dundee, the Scottish Mining Museum in Midlothian and the Scottish Fisheries Museum in Anstruther teach us about the lives of our forebears in ways that no other medium can. No film, DVD or television programme, however well made it might be, can compare with the experience of being inside the workplaces or homes of those who worked in those industries or with seeing the actual equipment with which they worked.

Speaking as a Labour Party member, I believe that such museums tell us why our forebears had to become involved in the trade union movement and why they had to fight for better conditions and a better environment. It is important that we support the industrial heritage museums, because we should not lose sight of where we came from. If we do not support them, we will lose sight of our past and our young people will not understand what their grandparents and great-grandparents had to endure in the course of their work.

As Alasdair Morgan said, Wanlockhead is a remote village. The Museum of Lead Mining brings visitors up to Wanlockhead who would not go there otherwise. I do not know the area as well as either Alasdair Morgan or Alex Fergusson, the previous and current constituency members, but I do not think that there is an awful lot at Wanlockhead to bring visitors up there other than the museum. It brings in people and money, supporting the local economy. It is a real asset to the area.

Back in 2003, during my brief period as Deputy Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, the Scottish Executive provided a grant of £30,000 to the Wanlockhead museum. I felt at the time that I was somewhat unpopular with officials for wanting to make the grant. The resistance seemed to come from the civil service. There was a feeling that, because some industrial museums had been set up independently or by voluntary bodies, they should not have any expectation of national support, as nobody had asked the National Museums of Scotland or whatever to set them up. The people who had set them up were apparently expected simply to get on with it.

I feel now, as I did at the time, that that is a churlish attitude, and I sense that the Executive is now moving away from that. The way in which the SHEP now describes the museums is different. A huge amount of effort has been put in by volunteers and by those who believe passionately in the preservation of that part of our heritage. We ought to congratulate and support the people who have done that, rather than just leave them to get on with it. I hope that there is a way forward, perhaps through a discussion around the expansion of the role of the National Museums, of which the industrial museums could somehow possibly become part.

It is important that we continue to support our industrial heritage, which I believe to be as important to our understanding of our past and of our nation's history as any artefact, any crown jewels or any other object that we might see stuck in a box somewhere. I hope that there is a way to develop a mechanism of long-term support for our industrial heritage.

17:19

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I congratulate my colleague Alasdair Morgan on securing the debate, although I take issue with his stating that the minister had to endure this debate after enduring the previous one. I thought that we made the previous debate relatively chirpy and stimulating. Mr Morgan can read the *Official Report* afterwards and see whether that description fits the bill.

I first encountered Wanlockhead completely by accident. I used to commute to Edinburgh from my home in Galloway. Once, on my way back down the road, I took the turn to the lead hills too fast—the first turn goes to Wanlockhead and the next to Elvanfoot. I made my way, on what can be described only as a helter-skelter road, up the hill to Wanlockhead, which I did not expect to find—it is an astonishing wee place—only to take the helter-skelter road back down again. I did not stop that day; I was in a very bad mood, because I had taken the wrong road and it was pouring with rain. However, I did return thereafter—I will come to that.

Wanlockhead is a strange place which, as far I understand it, has its roots way back in Roman times, when it was likely that the Romans mined lead there for their plumbing. After that, the monks came. Finally, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the London (Quaker) Lead Company started to mine in the area on a commercial basis. Although it mined lead primarily, I understand that the silver and gold for the mace in the Parliament came from the lead hills. Wanlockhead is a mystic little place in its own way.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Rev Porteous coined the phrase “God's Treasure House” to describe the area, because it was so rich in minerals. In 1876 he wrote that there were 274 men and boys employed in mining in Wanlockhead. In addition, there were shops, butchers, tailors and cloggers. There was even a doctor, who was paid for half by the Duke of Buccleuch and half through a levy, which I suppose was like our national insurance contributions.

The first miners were gold prospectors who lived in tents, from which a community developed. The population of the village in 2001, which I am sure has risen—I hope that it has—was 158. There were not many children, as the population was mainly elderly, and some of the houses were used as holiday homes.

The notes that I have state:

“Wanlockhead is still considered very rural and occasionally in winter, snow can still close the roads, completely isolating the village from the rest of Scotland and the World!”

That takes me to my last encounter with Wanlockhead, when I went to speak to a Burns supper. I set off, not in my Mini this time, but in a Ford Ka, on a snowy January night, with the snow piled up at the sides of the road. I think that Alasdair Morgan was there that night, too. There were stars in the sky and the moon was out. There was something unreal about driving up the helter-skelter road to the remote, rather romantic and dramatic village at the top. When I got there, there was not a soul in sight. I am known for taking the wrong road frequently, but I knew that I could not have done so this time, because I had been there before, in the rain. I got out of the car and walked about, but heard nothing and saw nobody—there was no sign of man, woman nor beast.

Finally, I located the village hall and opened the door. There were banners everywhere and I heard the clinking of glasses. Everybody was happy and chattering away. It was as if I had wandered into a Guinness advert—although I think that it is Tennants lager that reaches the parts that other beers cannot reach. The whole community was present, as it would have been on such occasions in the centuries when there was mining there.

Even today, after taking the city bypass and the motorway, when we get to Wanlockhead it seems as if we are in a different, dramatic and rather striking place. I take slight issue with Elaine Murray's saying that if the museum was not there, there would not be an awful lot to bring visitors there. I think that Wanlockhead village should be visited in its own right, given that it is Scotland's highest village and given its history, which of course includes that shown in the museum. People should visit that strange place that is balanced all on its own on the top of the lead hills.

I remember it being a striking little place and I will help the local tourist board with its adverts.

I hope that, after having endured—to use the words of my colleague—the previous debate, the minister will add Wanlockhead to her list of places to visit, if she has not visited it already. I hope that she will consider the issues that members have raised about the funding of its museum.

17:24

**Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD):** Unlike the members who have spoken hitherto, I have never managed to get to Wanlockhead. I have corresponded with Wanlockhead Museum Trust and tried to help it in the past, because its financial problems have continued off and on over a number of years. I make a definite pledge to visit this year.

Various aspects of the issue are typical. First, there is an enthusiastic bunch of local volunteers and the community is keen. I am in correspondence with ministers, although they never pay attention to anything that I say, about how we should give more power and resources to community councils and other community groups, so that they can be enterprising in supporting facilities such as the museum at Wanlockhead. There is local energy and talent and a wee bit of resources can enable people to develop local attractions into pillars of the community.

Secondly, we must consider how we attract more people to Wanlockhead, which is not easy to get to—in the past I have intended to visit the museum, but I did not get there. We should advertise the museum better. During the debate on the historic environment I mentioned that trails are a good idea. Many people go to New Lanark, which is hugely successful and is really just Wanlockhead on a large scale. It would be helpful if the many people who visit New Lanark could be induced to go to Wanlockhead, because it is a similar attraction. There could be a network of educational and tourist attractions in the area and pupils from schools in Glasgow and Edinburgh could be taken on a day trip to Wanlockhead at some point during their school career.

We could develop a network that built on the contribution of monks to the Scottish economy. Monks were the Tesco of medieval times. They were successful entrepreneurs and the Borders abbeys and sheep farms were the biggest enterprises in Scotland of the time. Monks developed salt panning at Prestonpans as well as lead mining, and monks established enterprises in Midlothian. We could develop an interesting network based on monkish activity.

We can use our brains to help Wanlockhead to become the well-known and well-supported

attraction that it should be, but in the meantime if a small amount of money is needed to keep the museum going, we should provide that. The minister does good work on large-scale cultural activities and there should be a similar attitude to smaller projects. We should keep the museum going until it can attract enough money to pay its way. I hope that the minister will respond, because between us we can make the museum a going concern.

17:28

**Murray Tosh (West of Scotland) (Con):** I congratulate Alasdair Morgan on securing the debate. It follows logically from the debate on historic environment policy, which the minister began by making the obvious but nonetheless important connection between our heritage and education. Donald Gorrie developed that point.

I was a school teacher for 25 years and I regularly taught Scottish history. Every year I would take the third year class on a day's field trip. We would go to Wanlockhead in the morning and New Lanark in the afternoon, so I am familiar with the reaction of children to both places. Throughout those years, the future of the museum at Wanlockhead was in doubt. There were regular staff shortages because the museum had no money and the film that the museum showed on continuous loop, which was the most academically informative part of the visit for my pupils, eventually began to deteriorate badly—either the museum has stopped showing the film or it has managed to replace it. Abandoned railway trucks and the detritus of old machinery lay rusting in the open air because there were no funds to conserve and protect them. Alex Fergusson showed me a letter today that says that the museum has recently had difficulties with the workers' cottages, which are an important part of the display. All those points go back to the museum's lack of core funding and security.

Donald Gorrie made an interesting comparison between Wanlockhead and New Lanark, which by contrast is a place of riches. At New Lanark, the critical mass from the volume of visitors and the range of activities allows the development and presentation of the site. While I will not diminish New Lanark at all, because it is a wonderful place to take children, it nonetheless is much less representative than Wanlockhead of the reality of working-class life during the development of industrial Scotland. Wanlockhead was not developed by utopian owners who set out to create what were, by the standards of the day, ideal working and living conditions. Wanlockhead was a remote place to which people were attracted by whatever means possible. They were not paid money, but were given credit for a year

and were then left in debt at the end of the year, which meant that, when they came to be hired again, like agricultural labourers in the pre-industrial system, they had no option but to sign on for another year of indentured labour. That was before the truck system and the system of company stores were made illegal.

The workers lived in appalling housing and worked in dreadful conditions, whether they were miners, drilling and blasting into the hillsides and penetrating down into the depths of the earth, or their children, panning for lumps of ore in the icy-cold waters of the streams that flow down the hillsides. Wanlockhead is representative of a way of life in industrial Scotland that we overlook. Earlier this afternoon, Des McNulty, in talking about industrial Scotland, spoke quite correctly about the great cities and the shipbuilding industry. Many people do that but fail to capture that industrial Scotland began in rural settings, such as textile villages in remote locations, such as New Lanark, and coal mining villages. Coal mining was not an urban experience, but it was Scotland's principal industrial occupation until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The vast majority of miners lived in isolated villages and communities, although many of them have now been swallowed up by larger towns. The same is true of our steel industry, which began in places such as Muirkirk and Glengarnock, which were isolated villages.

Wanlockhead is a magical place that captures Scotland's experience at the point at which industrialisation was beginning in rural settings. People lived in appalling circumstances that we could not believe nowadays. How did those men and their families react to the conditions and the health, living and wage standards that they endured? The answer is that they formed religious congregations, engaged in radical politics, joined temperance societies, played football and educated themselves. They clubbed together their pennies to build a library so that they could have real experience of Scotland's culture and educate the brightest of their children to give them a better life and future. I cannot think of a better monument to the pride and self-sufficiency of the Scottish industrial working class than the one that is provided at Wanlockhead.

I do not remember where, but during one of the activities of the Parliament, one of Donald Dewar's aides told a story of how Donald, on some trip that he had undertaken in his duties, had been taken way off the road but had insisted on returning to go to Wanlockhead to visit the library, because he understood its significance in the story of the Labour movement and Scotland's working classes. All of us should grasp and understand about Wanlockhead that it was a place where people battled by themselves against the most appalling conditions and, through self-help,

endured and left a monument that has been bequeathed to us.

That monument now requires core funding and a degree of financial stability so that it can contribute to what the Scottish Museums Council called in a publication this week one of the most important parts of our tourist industry—genealogical tourism. If we want to take people past the excellent websites and databases with which the genealogist starts and out to experience the life of the people of Scotland, we need places like Wanlockhead. The issue is not about propping up something out of sentiment and sympathy; it is about using an asset that survives and that can convey to our people and to tourists something of the reality of Scotland's past. It is an asset that we must cherish and that we must not allow to decay and wither.

17:34

**The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson):** I congratulate Alasdair Morgan on securing the debate and on describing the museum and the area in such an interesting way. All things considered, it has been an interesting afternoon and I have enjoyed the debates.

In responding to the cultural review, I was keen to clarify the roles of the Executive and of local authorities in supporting non-national museums; that is a description that I do not particularly like, but I am still struggling to come up with a better one. We stressed in our response to the cultural review that local authorities have a key role in ensuring cultural provision in their respective areas. The Executive proposes to promote the development of that responsibility, building on its substantial current contribution to achieve more consistent delivery and standards throughout Scotland. We propose that the culture bill will create a legislative framework for delivering rights and entitlements. In developing the bill, I will consider how its provisions could affect the existing duty to make what is described in the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994 as "adequate" provision.

Audit Scotland's performance improvement figures for 2003-04—the latest available—show that Dumfries and Galloway Council owns more museums than any other council in Scotland. I must admit that that surprised me. The council is doing well in terms of its expenditure; as we have heard, part of that expenditure goes to the Museum of Lead Mining, which will receive £37,000 in 2006-07. Dumfries and Galloway's net expenditure per head of population for heritage and museums is £7.44, which compares favourably with the Scottish average of £7.74.



The local authority is playing its part, but how does the Executive support non-national museums? The channel for that support is the Scottish Museums Council. That is not a smokescreen that I or anyone else want to hide behind. As well as general support for its members, the SMC administers a number of grant schemes on the Executive's behalf. The largest of those is the regional development challenge fund, which is providing about £1 million over the three years from 2003. The aim of the fund is to develop the capacity and sustainability of the museum sector through active partnerships. Ten partnerships have been established, covering the whole of Scotland. The Museum of Lead Mining and Dumfries and Galloway Council benefit from being partners in the future museum-south west collaboration.

Two other grant schemes administered by the SMC are the main grants scheme and the small grants scheme. In 2004-05, Wanlockhead Museum Trust received grants totalling £10,000.

**Alasdair Morgan:** Does the minister accept that, welcome though individual grants may be, they do not address the problem of the on-going gap in funding that I suspect will always be there? Does she understand the frustration of trustees and others who, having received answers in 2000, are still no nearer getting a final aye or nay? Is that in part due to what one could almost describe as the delaying tactics and churlish attitude of some civil servants? Only a fraction of the money that was spent on the cultural review would have kept Wanlockhead going well into the millennium.

**Patricia Ferguson:** I am coming to what might happen, so Alasdair Morgan's intervention is timely.

As colleagues will be aware, when I responded to the cultural review in January, I announced additional funding of £500,000 per annum over two years for non-national museums. That funding scheme, which will be administered by the Scottish Museums Council, is designed to support collections of national significance in the care of local authorities and other organisations. Future funding for non-national museums will focus on supporting significant national standard collections. We are reviewing with the SMC how best to channel support to industrial museums. I hope that that will not take much longer. We also expect our national institutions to provide advice and assistance to the non-national museums where appropriate.

As we have heard, the Wanlockhead miners library celebrates its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. It was established on 1 November 1756 by 32 men who said that it was "for our mutual improvement". As Alasdair Morgan correctly said, it is the second-

oldest subscription library in Scotland and, indeed, Europe.

Members will be aware that 2003 was the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of public libraries in Scotland, which developed from those subscription libraries. That anniversary was also commemorated by a debate in this Parliament. I remember the sniggers with which some of my colleagues on the Parliamentary Bureau greeted my suggestion of that topic for debate. However, it was one of the most oversubscribed debates that we have ever had, such was the positive attitude of members to libraries, particularly those in the areas that they represent. Everyone had a story to tell.

I link the two events to emphasise the Executive's additional support for local authorities. Not only is there an extra £500,000 a year for non-national museums, but the same amount is available to help the public library service to improve its standards of provision and facilitate co-operation.

As colleagues will have heard me say during the debate on the cultural review, the Executive currently dedicates 1 per cent of its total budget to culture and that figure is about to rise. The Executive's support for collections of national significance, including those held by the cultural non-departmental public bodies and agencies, will continue. We will channel funds to the collections that the nation owns and to the collections that are held and managed by bodies that are independent of Government. We will also seek to incentivise the raising of standards in museums throughout Scotland. As we seek to achieve greater efficiency in delivery, we will allocate resources to best attain national priorities for the conservation of collections and the improvement of public access to them.

However, support for non-national museums, such as the Museum of Lead Mining, must come primarily from the local authority, although there will be targeted financial backing from the Executive, channelled through the Scottish Museums Council. Additional funding will be available to collections that are of what we call a "significant national standard".

I am pleased to note that the celebration to mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the miners library starts this weekend. The event—called Scotland's highest birthday party—is part of the show Scotland series of events in museums and galleries across Scotland that is organised by the Scottish Museums Council.

The Scottish Museums Council awarded the Museum of Lead Mining a grant of £1,500 towards the celebration and would be happy to consider a further grant application for other events related to this anniversary.

The show Scotland initiative is a new creative events weekend celebrating Scotland's museums and galleries. A programme of exciting events designed to capture the public's imagination is taking place in more than 50 museums and galleries throughout Scotland this bank holiday weekend.

I hope that, as a result of our raising the profile of the Museum of Lead Mining in this debate and because it features in the show Scotland events, more visitors will be attracted to Wanlockhead and that that increase will help the museum to become more sustainable.

I am sure that this is a discussion that I will return to over the next few months, as our final programme is set out. Meanwhile, I congratulate Alasdair Morgan on securing this debate. I have been interested in the speeches and I will pay great heed to what has been said.

*Meeting closed at 17:44.*

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