



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 21 November 2012

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 21 November 2012

[The Deputy Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Portfolio Question Time

Culture and External Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions. In order to get in as many people as possible, I would like short and succinct questions and answers, please.

Edinburgh Economy (Winter Festival)

1. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its estimate is of the value to the Edinburgh economy of the winter festival season. (S4O-01496)

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): In 2010-11, Edinburgh's hogmanay festival—the flagship event of the winter festival season—contributed £32 million to the Scottish economy, of which £27 million directly benefited the Edinburgh economy. Scotland's winter festivals send a clear message that Scotland is open for business in the winter months, which provides a welcome economic boost for businesses.

Kezia Dugdale: The minister will be aware that one aspect of this year's winter festival is a promotion to try to get cafes, shops and retail outlets to open later in December and that the council is going to offer free parking to encourage that. Given the recent success of the museum late events and the need to offer more than just retail therapy in Edinburgh in December, will he undertake to speak to the National Galleries of Scotland and National Museums Scotland to see whether they, too, might come alive after 5?

Humza Yousaf: Of course, we are happy to engage with partners to explore the expo fund. A couple of years ago, the expo fund allowed museums, galleries and other attractions to open on 1 January for the first time, so that those tourists who were not in too fragile a state after the hogmanay celebrations could go out and enjoy what Edinburgh has to offer. The member makes a very good point and I am more than happy to engage with partners on that.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): What role has the Scottish Government's expo fund had in supporting Edinburgh's winter festivals?

Humza Yousaf: When the expo fund was initiated, many attractions opened on 1 January for the first time. On top of that, Scottish Government funding for the winter festivals this year will be £350,000 for the City of Edinburgh Council. Of that, £100,000 is for hogmanay, £65,000 is for St Andrew's day celebrations at Edinburgh castle and £4,000 is for Burnsfest at the Scottish storytelling centre. Edinburgh has received £200,000 for hogmanay from the Scottish Government's expo fund and £160,000 from EventScotland.

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): I thought that I heard just a hint of the criticism that Edinburgh gets too much. I put it to the minister that he must always remember that Edinburgh is the hook that gets tourists into Scotland, and it therefore deserves the money that is spent on it.

Humza Yousaf: I certainly intended no criticism. Although I am a born and bred Glaswegian, I appreciate everything that Edinburgh has to offer.

National Museums Scotland (Collections)

2. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether National Museums Scotland should make its collections available throughout the country. (S4O-01497)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government expects National Museums Scotland to give wide public access to its collections. There are many ways in which it can achieve that, including by digital as well as physical means, and its partners in the museums sector, including local authorities, can help to facilitate that.

Alex Fergusson: I entirely agree that National Museums Scotland can go about this in many ways. I know that the cabinet secretary is fully aware of its proposal to close its national collection of costumes at Shambellie house. Indeed, there is to be a members' business debate on that this evening, which I am sure the cabinet secretary is looking forward to as much as I am. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, in putting forward the proposal without any prior local consultation, National Museums Scotland is failing to explore the many alternative arrangements that could make Shambellie a more sustainable operation? Does she agree that a postponement of the decision for around 12 months would give an adequate period of grace in which to do that?

Fiona Hyslop: As I explained to Alex Fergusson when I met him and a number of MSPs on 7 November, that is an operational decision for the NMS board. However, I have met the board's chair and director to explore the different ways in which NMS can support and improve its collections offering in Dumfries and Galloway.

With regard to the future of Shambellie house, we must remember—as I mentioned at the meeting on 7 November—that we should not take for granted the position of staff who work there, as they may have other opportunities on offer. Local members have expressed strong views, and I have indicated that I will pass those on to the board as there is an important board meeting coming up in the next week or so. Although I take those concerns on board, it is not for me to determine whether there should be a postponement. However, I can and will ensure—along with the local authorities and local members—that the NMS board is fully cognisant of the need to improve the provision of national collections in Dumfries and Galloway.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I am grateful to the minister for her helpful answer to Alex Fergusson on Shambellie house. Like Mr Fergusson, I look forward to this evening's debate.

I ask the minister to recognise that some collections lend themselves better than others to digitisation. The artefacts that are available in a costume museum might not be as well enhanced by that method as other collections might.

Could National Museums Scotland be encouraged to think about what use could be made of Shambellie house in the winter season, when it is normally closed, and whether that might be an opportunity to devolve some of the other NMS collections to Dumfries and Galloway, as well as to other parts of Scotland, in order to give the house more of a life throughout the year?

Fiona Hyslop: Patricia Ferguson will recall that my answer on digitisation was purely in response to a very general question from Alex Fergusson.

To be fair, National Museums Scotland has looked at using better public relations promotion of the activity at Shambellie house. The house is quite small and has small rooms, which means that, at any one time, only 50 out of 6,000 costumes are on display. Having said that, I think that Patricia Ferguson's line of argument on the diversification of the use of Shambellie house is one that we could all explore, and I encourage National Museums Scotland to do so.

Creative Scotland

3. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what contact the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs has had with Creative Scotland in the last month. (S4O-01498)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I met Creative Scotland on Wednesday 14 November at my regular scheduled meeting with the chair of the

board. Over the month, I have kept in close contact with Creative Scotland through my officials. I was with one of the board members and Creative Scotland officials on Sunday night when I presented the Creative Scotland games award at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards.

Ken Macintosh: I thank the minister for her answer, although I am not sure, given the level of discontent with Creative Scotland among the artistic community and creative organisations, whether that indicates a more hands-on approach or not.

Does the minister think that Creative Scotland's move from long-term funding to project-based funding for the arts has been a success?

Fiona Hyslop: That move has not taken place: there has been a delay and an operational review, as Ken Macintosh will know if he has been following the debate. I have asked the board to look at the issues, and two pieces of work will be presented to it on 6 December, one of which covers some of the wider operational issues about which Mr Macintosh raises concerns. However, I can say—perhaps I should correct my initial answer—that the first elements of the flexible funding have been allocated. All apart from one have been allocated for two years, which is the same amount of time that the previous flexible funding programmes covered. One programme was allocated less than two years' funding at its own request. There is no shortening of the funding period, but there is an issue with regard to operation, which is why one of the board reviews will look at precisely that area of concern.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): How will Creative Scotland engage with the year of natural Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: We are now moving into the year of natural Scotland. As with all the other themed years, we are encouraging different agencies to work on helping to celebrate it, and Creative Scotland will be contributing. I understand that Creative Scotland has allocated £1 million to help to celebrate the year of natural Scotland. Some of that will relate to the interpretation of John Muir, who is a very important figure in Scotland, and some will relate to other artistic formats. Opportunities are available to artists, who can look at the Creative Scotland website if they want to take part in what is planned for next year.

Youth Music Initiative

4. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it measures the impact of the youth music initiative. (S4O-01499)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Creative Scotland manages the delivery and monitoring of the youth music initiative on behalf of the Government. All funded projects are required to submit to Creative Scotland an end of project report and, where necessary, interim reports.

The real impacts and measures of this successful initiative are evident through the achievements of projects that have been undertaken by the likes of Fèis Rois with traditional Gaelic music, Sistema Scotland's big noise orchestras and the flourishing Scottish Brass Band Association. I will attend the youth brass band championships on Saturday.

The Scotland-wide youth music initiative supports more than 300 projects annually. Since its inception in 2003, it has continued to ensure that all Scotland's primary school children have access to one year of free music tuition. At the end of academic year 2010-11, 1.7 million attendances at YMI-funded programmes were recorded across all local authority areas.

Angus MacDonald: Cultural co-ordinators at Falkirk Council and, latterly, Falkirk Community Trust have drawn down nearly £1.2 million from the youth music initiative since 2007, and the total that has been drawn down in Falkirk district in the past five years stands at £1,386,000. I have seen at first hand the benefits that the initiative can bring to young people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question, please.

Angus MacDonald: Can the cabinet secretary assure me that this excellent initiative will continue in future years?

Fiona Hyslop: Despite severe pressures from the Westminster Government, I have, within the culture budget, been able to maintain the youth music initiative at a value of £10 million. I join the member in congratulating those who have been involved on the outstanding work that has been done in the Falkirk area using the youth music initiative.

China (Treatment of Tibetan People)

5. Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government, further to the First Minister's meeting with the Chinese ambassador to the United Kingdom in June 2012, what representations it has made to China regarding the treatment of the Tibetan people. (S4O-01500)

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government has not made any specific representations to China regarding the treatment of Tibetan people since the First

Minister's meeting with the Chinese ambassador in June 2012. However, Scottish ministers regularly use opportunities to raise the varied issues of human rights in appropriate speeches on China and meetings with the Chinese. The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs met the Chinese consul general in May and used the opportunity to highlight the Scottish Government's concerns.

We are committed to engaging with the Chinese Government on human rights as part of our overall engagement. Scotland is justly proud of its reputation for ethical business practices and knows that human rights and the rule of law are key to long-term economic success and social stability. We will continue to share those experiences and values in our dealings with China in the future.

Anne McTaggart: The minister will be aware of the recent and increasing instances of self-immolation as a form of protest in Tibet and will recognise how tragic the consequences of that have been for the families of those who have died in the struggle against Chinese oppression. Does the Scottish Government intend to raise the issues of Tibet and Chinese human rights abuses in any future meetings with the Chinese Government and officials? Will the Scottish Government make representations to the United Kingdom Government and ask it to apply diplomatic pressure in order to avoid the tragic consequences that the people of Tibet have become all too familiar with?

Humza Yousaf: Of course I and the Scottish Government share the member's concerns. Self-immolation is a desperate course of action for anyone to take and our sympathies go with the families of those affected. We urge the Chinese Government to work with local monasteries and communities to resolve the underlying grievance that has led to the self-immolations. We believe and have said that the long-term solution depends on respect for human rights and genuine autonomy for Tibetans within the framework of the Chinese constitution.

I reiterate that we have raised and continue to raise, when appropriate, a number of concerns on this and other human rights issues. Human rights will be a key theme in our refreshed China plan, which is due out before the end of the year.

Historic Scotland (Conservation Areas)

6. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assistance Historic Scotland provides to support and regenerate conservation areas. (S4O-01501)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Historic

Scotland provides grant support for the regeneration of conservation areas in Scotland through the agency's conservation area regeneration scheme. Since 2007, more than £16 million has been invested in 35 separate projects in 24 local authority areas. That has levered in match funding of more than £96 million.

Jamie McGrigor: Does the cabinet secretary agree that the Robert Adam planned village of Inveraray in Argyll and Bute is a fantastic example of a thriving conservation area and a popular tourist destination? Is she aware of the need for about £3 million-worth of building repairs to the historic buildings of Inveraray, including the avenue arch and the courthouse? Will she join me in expressing the hope that Historic Scotland will respond positively to Argyll and Bute Council's recent application for funding support to restore and maintain Inveraray's built heritage under its conservation area regeneration scheme?

Fiona Hyslop: I agree that Inveraray is one of Scotland's most important planned towns and that it can tell a positive story about place making not only in the past but in the future. I understand that Argyll and Bute Council's application for £970,000 has been submitted to round 5 of Historic Scotland's CAR scheme; the round 5 applications are being assessed and applicants will be notified in early 2013. I am sure that Argyll and Bute Council's proposal is very positive and look forward to the response when Historic Scotland makes its decision in early 2013.

Scottish Catholic Archives

7. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when the Scottish Catholic archives will be made available to genealogy centres in Kilmarnock and Glasgow in addition to the Edinburgh centre. (S4O-01502)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The records referred to are the property of the Catholic church and the National Records of Scotland does not have its permission to make them available at local family history centres. The records are available at the ScotlandsPeople centre in Edinburgh and on the internet at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk.

Willie Coffey: The cabinet secretary will of course be aware of the importance of providing access to Catholic archives and history as close as possible to the west of Scotland centres where many Catholic people live. Will she agree to consult further with the Catholic church on whether it will review the arrangements to ensure that there is equal access for people who live in the west of Scotland as well as for those in Edinburgh?

Fiona Hyslop: I reiterate that permission is required from the Catholic church. I recall that Willie Coffey last wrote to me on this issue in January and on the back of this question I am happy to again ask the National Records of Scotland to seek the Catholic church's permission to provide access. As I have said, it will be up to the church to make that decision, but I am happy to take forward the issue on Willie Coffey's behalf.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 has not been lodged by John Park, for understandable reasons.

Sites of Historical and Archaeological Interest

9. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to protect sites of historical and archaeological interest. (S4O-01504)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Through Historic Scotland, Scottish ministers work closely with local authorities, landholders and communities to protect and enhance the country's historic environment, and that work is carried out in the context of a wide range of legislation, policy and guidance delivered at national and local level. Historic Scotland also administers grants for historic environment projects on behalf of Scottish ministers, with £14.5 million a year available to help to enhance and promote the historic environment for the benefit of our communities.

Margaret Mitchell: The cabinet secretary will be aware that these sites are often under threat as a result of planning applications from developers. The Douglas Support estate in Viewpark glen in North Lanarkshire is an area of historical and archaeological importance to the local community, and was acknowledged as such in a survey by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. Despite that and despite the fact that a previous application was withdrawn in 2004, the site is again the subject of a proposed development. Will the cabinet secretary outline the action that local communities can take and what support, if any, is available from the Scottish Government to help local communities and organisations such as the Viewpark conservation group to protect sites of historical and archaeological interest both in these circumstances and in general?

Fiona Hyslop: I know that the member was in touch yesterday with Historic Scotland about the Douglas Support or Rosehall estate, which I believe is near to the M8 in the Bellshill area of North Lanarkshire. However, the organisation has had no recent involvement in the matter. Although an application was made to list the structures, which are ruinous, it was decided not to designate

them as they were not of sufficient interest to be so designated.

However, as the member has noted, there might be some archaeological interest in the area. Such matters should be addressed in the planning process, which, of course, is ultimately the responsibility of local authorities. Nevertheless, I encourage the member and her constituents with an interest in the issue to look at the archaeological angle rather than to pursue the matter on the basis of the structures themselves.

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): Is it not incumbent on everyone who knows the Douglas Support estate to reflect the proposal accurately? Is it not the case that protection of the archaeology and wildlife in the area is part of the plan? Instead of framing the debate in terms of the area's destruction, should we not debate the potential to protect the area, protect the wildlife and bring much-needed jobs to the community?

Fiona Hyslop: Michael McMahon will know that, as a minister, I will not make a judgment on whether the planning application should go ahead. If there are concerns about heritage or archaeology, those issues can be pursued but, as I said, that is part of the planning process. I am sure that, as part of that process, the local authority and its members will consider all the issues, including the protection that is planned in the application and the wider circumstances. I will not make a judgment on whether it is appropriate to approve the planning application; that is a matter for the local authority.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes this set of questions. I apologise to John Pentland that we did not reach question 10.

Infrastructure, Investment and Cities

Road Improvements (Scottish Borders)

1. John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to improve the A1, A7 and the A68 roads in the Scottish Borders. (S4O-01506)

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): The strategic transport projects review recommended a programme of active management and targeted individual investments on the A1, A7 and A68 to maintain and safely operate the routes.

Since 2007, we have completed the A68 Dalkeith bypass and major improvements on the A7 at Auchenrivock. Our trunk road programme contains further planned major improvements for the A68 at Pathhead and Soutra. We have also invested around £30 million since 2007 on

maintenance and road safety activities across the three routes. We estimate that, in 2013-14, we will spend up to a further £4 million.

John Lamont: The minister will know that those roads provide vital links from the Borders to the rest of the United Kingdom. However, none of them was identified for significant investment in the Scottish Government's infrastructure plans, which were published last year. Does the Government have any intention to change those plans? Will the minister explain why none of the routes was identified for improvements in last year's plan?

Keith Brown: I have already explained the improvements that have taken place, and that about another £4 million is to be spent in 2013-14. In addition, the STPR identified the best solution for the routes as being that we actively manage their safety.

Of course, there are demands for upgrading roads. The A1, A7 and A68 were not upgraded under previous Administrations; perhaps that bears some examination. The amount of maintenance that we carry out is commensurate with safety needs. To make further improvements and to implement further projects would, of course, have substantial capital implications. Perhaps, in that context, John Lamont should reflect on the fact that he supported £500 million being spent on the trams project rather than on those projects, and that he therefore bears some responsibility for the capital situation that we are in.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): What impact will the operation of the Borders railway have on reducing traffic usage on the A7?

Keith Brown: As was stated when the announcement on the Borders railway was made, we expect that the Borders railway will take some traffic off the roads and have significant environmental and safety benefits.

As Christine Grahame knows—because she was at the launch—the Borders railway project is hugely supported in the Borders. I very much look forward to the day when the trains start to run on that route and to the benefits that it will bring in terms of congestion and the amount of traffic on the roads.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): The minister will be aware that the A7 is trunked only as far as Galashiels and then ceases to be the responsibility of Transport Scotland. Given the widely acknowledged concerns of many people in the Borders over the safety of stretches of that road north of Galashiels, does he agree that safety on the A7 must be improved and that it would be more appropriate for Transport Scotland to take ownership of it at Galashiels and north of it?

Keith Brown: I am trying to recall whether Jim Hume made that suggestion when the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition was in power here at Holyrood or whether his conversion to it is just recent.

He and his party have talked about increasing centralisation. Why would we want to take control of the roads that are properly in the control of local authorities? The A7 is a local authority road. Of course we have an interest in its safety and will continue to discuss that with the council. However, the trunk road network was set by the Conservatives in the mid 1990s. Jim Hume's party has not challenged it previously, and I see no reason to change it now.

House Building (Planning Applications)

2. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what impact it expects the average of 77 weeks for a decision on major housing applications to have on the house construction industry. (S4O-01507)

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay): Delays in the planning system inhibit sustainable economic growth. As my statement to Parliament in September made clear, I put performance at the very heart of an efficiently functioning planning service. This is the first time that we have seen performance statistics showing the average time taken to make a decision. In addition to the next steps package of proposals that I have already announced, my officials will look specifically at why particular decisions took so long and identify where the barriers to determination were.

Alex Johnstone: I thank the minister for his most sincere answer. Given that the wait is now almost one year longer than the statutory 16-week period, will he consider the example that is being set by the Westminster Government, which is prepared to cut red tape in order to achieve improvements in planning decision timescales? Will he consider similar measures and will he accept that, if he does, he will have the sincerest support from me and my party?

Derek Mackay: I am sure that Mr Johnstone would agree that I am always sincere when giving answers in Parliament. I agree that the 76-week timescale is unacceptable, but it is refreshing that, in looking at the statistics, we can flush out the issues that need to be addressed. We have gone beyond the traditional two-month and four-month targets.

On what is happening in England, I think that the Conservatives would have us take the quite curious position that centralisation of the planning system should be the way forward in Scotland. That does not quite fit with the Conservatives'

other press releases on the planning appeals system, especially in relation to renewables and other matters.

The Scottish Government will drive up improvement by delivering a range of actions, in partnership with planning authorities, key agencies and other stakeholders, in order to ensure that we have better performance. I refer Alex Johnstone to the better regulation bill consultation, which considers penalties when performance is not delivered. Crucially, this is about delivery. I ask him to reflect on the fact that approvals in Scotland—including housing—are at some 93 or 94 per cent. That shows that the system is working and that there is more than just timescales to planning: consents and confidence in the system are also required. We will continue to ensure that many measures are taken so that the planning system can contribute fully to sustainable economic growth.

Affordable Housing Supply Programme

3. Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what impact the affordable housing supply programme will have on levels of poverty. (S4O-01508)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): Housing is a key part of our physical, economic and social fabric, and getting housing right will contribute to our purpose of sustainable economic growth. Our target is to deliver at least 30,000 affordable homes during the lifetime of this Parliament. That will contribute significantly to our wider aims of tackling poverty and health inequalities and building confidence and capacity in our communities.

Margaret McCulloch: In evidence to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, Shelter Scotland said that the combination of aggressive welfare reform and a 45 per cent cash-terms reduction in affordable housing expenditure over the spending review period amounts to

"a real one-two knockout punch for low-income families".—*[Official Report, Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, 24 October 2012; c 970.]*

The United Kingdom Government has got it wrong on the budget and on welfare reforms, but will the Scottish ministers accept that they have got it wrong in presenting an affordable housing budget that has been cut so much that social landlords are now faced with an impossible choice of putting up rents or putting the brakes on house building altogether? Why should the Scottish budget be balanced on the backs of those who are in the most need?

Nicola Sturgeon: First, let me say to Margaret McCulloch that we are suffering, or are about to

suffer, the impact of aggressive welfare cuts—I have just come from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations conference on welfare reform—because this Parliament is unable to make decisions on welfare for us in order to ensure that we have a welfare system that is fit for purpose and which protects the most vulnerable people in our society. Anybody in this Parliament who is concerned about those changes would do well to argue for this Parliament's having the power to change things rather than simply to mitigate the impacts of Tory Westminster policies.

On housing, all budgets are under pressure right now, and I absolutely acknowledge the pressures that are faced by those who work in housing provision. However, in the face of a 33 per cent cut to our capital budget over the spending review period, this Government will invest at least £760 million in our affordable housing supply programme over the next three years—that includes, of course, the £260 million within the local government settlement. What we have to do—this is our challenge and our determination—is to get as much out of that money as we possibly can, so value for money and leverage from that resource are absolutely central. I will give the member some statistics that show what we are seeking to do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, please.

Nicola Sturgeon: In the last year of the previous Labour Government, £562 million delivered fewer than 5,000 houses. In 2011-12, the Scottish Government spent £352 million and delivered just short of 7,000 houses. That is what happens when we strive for value for money.

High-speed Rail Project

4. Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it will publish the cost and cost benefit analysis of the high-speed rail project between Glasgow and Edinburgh. (S4O-01509)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): We will embark on detailed business-case planning early in 2013. The detail of that will, of course, be shared with Parliament before any decision to give formal approval to the project.

Annabel Goldie: On 12 November, the Deputy First Minister announced, amid clouds of rhetoric, the intention to cut the train journey time between Glasgow and Edinburgh to under 30 minutes by 2024. That was all very exciting, but the distinction between a realistic aspiration and pie in the sky propaganda is a fine one. In 2007, the Scottish Government costed the project at £7 billion. Is that

figure still relevant and, if not, by how much is it irrelevant?

Nicola Sturgeon: I agree with Annabel Goldie that the project is exciting and ambitious. I am pleased that the Scottish Government is seeking to pursue an ambition on that scale. It is not “pie in the sky”, as I think Annabel Goldie described it. Our position on high-speed rail is informed by the output of close partnership working on the business case for high-speed rail to Scotland. That partnership brought together the expertise of local authorities, business organisations, regional transport partnerships, trade unions and environmental and infrastructure expert groups. Their recommendations, including that a high-speed Edinburgh to Glasgow line could bring early economic benefits, are being acted on. We have technical and planning reports, which suggest that the building of a new line by 2024 is feasible and that we can achieve sub-30 minute connections between the two cities.

The most recent financial estimate is actually from HS2 Ltd in 2009, which suggested a figure of about £8 billion to £9 billion, but we will of course have to work with the Department for Transport and HS2 to fully understand the costs that are involved, once we have taken more decisions on, for example, the route. Parliament will be fully informed about the process as it develops.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): If the cabinet secretary is willing to spend £8 billion or £9 billion—which is even more than Annabel Goldie suggested—on the route, where is the logic of cutting a third of the budget from the Edinburgh to Glasgow rail improvement plan, the benefits of which would be far more cost-effective and felt much sooner?

Nicola Sturgeon: If Richard Baker had been listening, he would have heard me say that that was the latest estimate; I am not saying that that is what the budget will be. What the budget will be and how we will fund the project will flow from the decisions that we take on the route and other matters. Parliament will be fully informed in the decision-making process. I encourage Richard Baker and others to consider the economic benefits that are estimated to flow from high-speed rail—not just between our two cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, but if Scotland is fully linked to high-speed rail to London. Any good Government should strive to achieve that. I hope that we can encourage all members to get behind us on that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Margo MacDonald can ask a question, if it is brief.

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): With all due respect to the cabinet secretary, I think that the priorities are wrong. I do not think that too many folk will be put off doing business in Glasgow or

Edinburgh because of a few minutes on the journey between the two. It might be more imaginative to try to get into the high-speed rail link going down the east coast and to get in bed with some of the English authorities that would also benefit from that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have a question, please?

Margo MacDonald: That is it.

Nicola Sturgeon: We had a summit in Glasgow just last week, which included people from England. Margo MacDonald might have been right—if we were focusing on the link between Glasgow and Edinburgh as the be-all and end-all. However, ultimately, we want Scotland to be fully linked with high-speed rail right to London. That will bring economic benefits, so the Scottish Government should work towards that. Other members, although not Margo MacDonald, might lack the ambition that would see that being delivered, but the Government does not.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary confirm that the proposals for the high-speed rail link between Edinburgh and Glasgow will have no effect on the proposed improvements to the line from the central belt to Inverness, some of which have already been implemented? A local member of Parliament has been mischief making and saying that the Glasgow to Edinburgh line will take all the money away from the north line.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am happy to confirm to Dave Thompson that we will press ahead with the improvements that were announced in the high-level output specification on 21 June. That will deliver infrastructure improvements and reduced journey times in the coming investment control period, which will come on top of the journey-time improvements of up to 17 minutes from next month between Glasgow and Inverness.

I am clear that in order to gain the maximum benefit from high-speed rail's introduction in Scotland, connections from its destination points to the rest of Scotland must also be improved.

M8 Upgrade

5. Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made toward the commencement of construction of the Newhouse to Baillieston M8 upgrade. (S4O-01510)

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): The M8, M73 and M74 motorway improvements non-profit-distributing model contract is in procurement, with construction currently targeted to commence in late 2013.

Michael McMahon: The minister will be aware that I have been in constant contact with Transport Scotland about progress on this issue. At the last meeting that I had with Transport Scotland, sometime in September, I heard that an indication on the final decision on the contract would be given around this time. Can the minister confirm that that is the case?

Does the minister agree that the issue is not just about the jobs that will come from building the M8, the Raith interchange and the M74, and that the potential economic growth of the area depends on the swift construction of the M8? Will he give a commitment that there will be no further slippage on the project, which matters a great deal not only to the economy of central Lanarkshire but to Scotland as a whole?

Keith Brown: Michael McMahon might have had this information from Transport Scotland already, but I will give it to him now in any case. The invitation to tender took place in June. The change in bidders from four to two will take place in December. We will announce the preferred bidder in May 2013, and the financial close and award will be in October 2013.

The length of time for the procurement and construction process will be comparable to those for the M74 and the M80 projects.

I agree with Michael McMahon about the economic benefits that will arise from the improvement in the roads. There will be substantial benefits not only from having faster links but from the construction work and the jobs and local spending that will be created. We intend to keep to our timetable, which is similar to those for previous projects.

Cycling Infrastructure

6. Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it will take to improve cycling infrastructure. (S4O-01511)

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): Since 2007, the Scottish Government has invested more than £83 million in cycling infrastructure. In the remainder of this spending review period, a further £28.5 million will be allocated to Sustrans, and local authorities will be able to bid for a share of that money on a match-funding basis. In addition, £20 million will be allocated directly to local authorities for cycling, walking and safer streets projects.

Claudia Beamish: What commitments has the Scottish Government made to ensure that segregated cycle paths are included in all new transport infrastructure, whether it be rail or road? A lot of research shows that a journey culture

change can come about only with the creation of safe cycleways.

Keith Brown: As the member knows from previous discussions on this topic, we say that every new major project must include accommodation of active travel options. It is fair to say that the accommodation of segregated cycle tracks will be easier in some of those projects than others. Through the moneys that I mentioned earlier, we have invested in specific cycle networks, which often run alongside main arterial routes. Our recent announcement will improve that infrastructure in various places—not least from Edinburgh to Fife, a connection that was mentioned by several members in the recent debate.

If we are spending large amounts of money on the roads projects that we have to take forward, we ensure that there are active travel options to go with them.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): The minister will recall that one of the actions in the cycling action plan for Scotland was to join up the national cycle network in Scotland. I therefore welcome the additional investment that will be made to assist in achieving that goal.

Given that other European countries have areas that are segregated for the use of cyclists, which Claudia Beamish mentioned, what more is the Scottish Government doing to encourage councils to invest in dedicated cycle paths? Many more people in Scotland would cycle if they felt that it was safe to do so.

Keith Brown: I understand that point. I have already mentioned the moneys that we have made available, which local authorities can bid for in order to improve the cycle networks in their areas.

It is fair to say that some authorities have done more than others. For example, the City of Edinburgh Council has been effective in what it has done to encourage cycling in the city centre, and my local authority area in Clackmannanshire has an almost complete cycling network. Other areas have not been quite as proactive, but they have the chance to be proactive with the moneys that we have announced, because they can match fund them.

On the overriding issue of cycling safety, I refer to the recent announcement, which is accompanied by a commitment to ensure that as many children as possible have on-road training—we want to achieve 100 per cent in that regard. That approach gives children more experience of being on the road and, crucially, reassures parents that their children will have the correct training so that they can allow them to use cycling as an option whenever necessary.

Active Travel

7. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities is doing to ensure a modal shift toward active travel. (S4O-01512)

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government has a range of work under way with partners to promote active travel and, in particular, to deliver the cycling action plan for Scotland, published in June 2010, with its ambitious vision of 10 per cent of journeys to be by bike by 2020. A refresh of the cycling action plan for Scotland for spring 2013 has recently been announced.

Around £30 million is being invested in supporting cycling and walking during the current spending review period. The Scottish Government also funds all local authorities to deliver cycling, walking and safer streets projects through the ring-fenced capital plans, with a £6.06 million allocation this financial year. In addition, a national walking strategy is now under development, and policy to promote travel will continue to be developed following the evaluation of the smarter choices, smarter places demonstration programme.

Alison Johnstone: The minister will be aware that a cyclist died yesterday in a collision in Aberdeen and that *The Times* reports that the cyclist death toll on United Kingdom roads is heading for a five-year high. Many organisations agree that transforming our infrastructure for cycling and walking is key to improving safety and the perception of safety, which is a barrier to modal shift. For example, a survey of 20,000 Automobile Association members found that 62 per cent wanted more cycle lanes.

As Cycling Scotland has said, without a fully costed action plan, it is difficult to see how the current levels of investment will achieve the Government's own 10 per cent target. Will the minister commit to spending a much larger proportion of the transport budget on active travel, and will he work with ministerial colleagues to get more funding from other budget areas?

Keith Brown: I responded to a number of the points that have just been raised in my answer to Jim Eadie. In addition, the member will get more detail on the points that she and Jim Eadie raised in their joint letter.

I agree with the member on the issue of the perception of safety, which is absolutely crucial to ensuring that more people go out on the roads on their bikes. I have already described what we are doing to help achieve that and what we are trying to do to make things safer.

We are not starting from the same position as the Dutch authorities; we are starting from a very different position in relation to the infrastructure that must be put in. However, I think that we have given a strong commitment in that regard, and I am willing to continue the dialogue with Alison Johnstone and Jim Eadie to see how we can do even more in the future.

Business Tourism

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-04886, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on business tourism. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons as soon as possible. If you are all sitting comfortably, we will begin. I call on Fergus Ewing to speak to and move the motion. Mr Ewing, you have 14 minutes, when you are ready.

14:43

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

I am delighted to secure this debate on business tourism and I am pleased to see the cross-party recognition of the importance of the motion. In the spirit of consensus, let me say at the outset that we intend to accept the Labour amendment, but with two points of clarification, the first of which is that Aberdeen City Council has agreed to waive the accumulated £26.2 million that is referred to in the amendment. We believe that provision may have been made for that, but that it is not yet paid for. Secondly, the claim with regard to the number of business tourism delegates who travel to Glasgow should refer to international delegates. However, with those two points, on which I hope that we can agree, clarified, we are delighted to support the Labour amendment.

Business tourism is extremely important to Scotland. The meetings, incentives, conferences and events—MICE—market is hugely important for Scotland. It is on track to be a £1 billion industry each year. I can assure members that the Scottish Government is wholly committed to the success of business tourism. Scotland, for example, is the only country in the United Kingdom to have a team—VisitScotland's business tourism unit—dedicated to the MICE market.

The purpose of the debate is to allow all parties to discuss business tourism as a key part of one of the priority sectors in the Scottish economy and our economic strategy. It also enables us to say a big thank you to all the stakeholders and partners who are involved in making business tourism such a great success. They include Stephen Leckie of Crieff Hydro, who should be somewhere up in the gallery—hi, Stephen; I hope that I am allowed to say that, Presiding Officer. Stephen heads up the Scottish Tourism Alliance and has put a power of work into making it a great success in bringing together the industry. I recommend that more businesses should join the STA, because the more members it has, the stronger its voice will be

and the more effective its lobbying will be on some of the most important issues that affect the industry.

Business tourism has moved from being perceived as a niche part of Scotland's overall tourism sector to becoming one of the main focuses of interest, and one that is strongly supported by a wide range of Scotland's agencies and destinations. There are two reasons for that. The first is the direct economic contribution that business tourism makes. Meetings and conventions of only 500 delegates can deliver an economic impact of £1 million, while a gathering of 5,000 delegates can deliver one of more than £10 million. The second reason is that business tourism showcases our assets to the world, boosts our exports, enhances our reputation and helps to attract inward investment.

Business tourism is a key driver of growth and collaboration for Scotland, not least as a kind of bridge between tourism and inward investment. Business tourism is different because it supports a wide range of small, medium and large companies across Scotland that are not necessarily involved in the leisure market. They include conference centres, catering companies, unique venues, charitable status venues, civic venues, academic venues, florists, design agencies, audiovisual companies, and coach and private hire companies; I could go on.

In addition, business tourism is less seasonal than leisure tourism. That is a highly significant point. It brings visitors to the country outside the traditional leisure season. Business tourism visitors spend from one and a half to nearly two times more than leisure visitors in local shops, restaurants, bars, taxis and other places. Business tourism visitors have a high propensity to return—an interesting statistic is that 40 per cent of them return to Scotland. Therefore, if we can attract 10 new people to Scotland as business tourists, it is likely that four of them will come back, and they might bring their families. That is another useful benefit of the expansion and success of business tourism.

Business tourism, especially the conference and meetings sections, currently makes a strong contribution to the economic vitality of Scotland's key tourism destinations. It has a particular focus on the cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen, as well as principal resort destinations such as Gleneagles, St Andrews and Perthshire. However, we do not see business tourism as being solely for the larger venues or the cities, even though our cities have a huge amount to offer in their history and heritage, their unique venues and their luxury hotels. A great number of luxury hotels, particularly in the capital city, have

had enormous sums invested in them, as I have had the pleasure to see over the past year or so.

As I said, business tourism is not just about the cities. The whole of Scotland has a wealth of distinctive venues and top-class accommodation. I have had the pleasure of meeting buyers for corporate events and hospitality on several occasions. It does not tax the investigative powers of a Sherlock Holmes to detect that I have been at more than a few business dinners over the past wee while—duty calls. I have done that in the service of the nation. I am departing from my script slightly.

In the course of fulfilling that duty, I have had the great pleasure of meeting visitors from many countries, as well as members of august bodies such as the Professional Convention Management Association, which brings together people who organise the most important and most lucrative conferences and conventions in the world, and Trailblazers. I have met people who arrange the most lucrative incentive holidays for large companies such as Allianz of Austria; I attended one such event in the Signet library. It is clear that they look for something unique—an event or a venue that Scotland can offer that money alone cannot buy. We are committed to spreading the benefits of that across Scotland. It is a key segmentation of the market and one in which an urban location is not necessarily an advantage, or the sole advantage.

The Scottish Government will provide a response to the points that were made in the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's report on the winning years that was published on Monday, but it is timeous that paragraph 29 of that report states that the committee wants to ensure that rural areas benefit from tourism as well as the major cities. I heard the convener of that committee opining to that effect on Radio Scotland a day or so ago, and we endorse that point.

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): Just before the minister moves on, what did the gentleman whom he met who organised conferences—or who knew all about them—say were the priorities for getting conferences?

Fergus Ewing: There are a variety of priorities. Conference managers want to have top-class venues. They want to have splendid hotels and good food and drink. They receive those from Scotland and we have received some outstanding testimonials to that effect. They also want certainty and predictability—like every other person who makes a deal, they want to get what they pay for. They do not want to be taken advantage of; they want to pay a reasonable price and get excellent value for that price.

As a further response to Margo MacDonald's question, I will read out some of the testimonials about Scotland from some of the global buyers from the very visits that I described earlier. One of the global buyers said about a visit:

"This was the best trip I have been on in 25 years in this business".

Another one said:

"For me it has not only been a great experience but an holistic one. I enjoyed the country, the facilities, the activities, the food, the ambience, the group—awesome."

Those testimonials are praise indeed for Scotland.

Turning to the conference bid fund, the Scottish Government listened to the industry and recognised the value that business tourism brings. We heard the industry's calls about the need to be even more competitive on a global level. That is why we launched the conference bid fund in March 2012. That fund is providing £2 million over three years to match fund bids for major conferences for key sectors.

VisitScotland, to which much praise is due for the work that it has done, including the work done by the business tourism unit that is headed by Neil Brownlee, estimates that 18 conferences have been secured thus far with the conference bid fund. Those 18 conferences are estimated to have an economic impact of £56 million between 2013 and 2020, with a VisitScotland conference bid fund spend of £527,000.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Fergus Ewing: In a minute.

I cannot think of many uses to which taxpayers' money have been put that have seen such returns. The total return to the public purse for every £1 spent—and I have £1 here—is £53, so the £1 coin that I am holding in my hand has been joined by 52 others as a result of the overall success of the fund.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A tour de force of arithmetical explanation. Christine Grahame?

Christine Grahame: Am I the tour de force? No. Of those successful bids, were any from other than urban areas? My concern is that rural areas such as the Scottish Borders are losing out on the conference bid fund.

Fergus Ewing: Christine Grahame is absolutely right—as I have already alluded to, the successful fund applications to the bid fund have largely been in Glasgow and Edinburgh, although other locations have benefited, including St Andrews and Dundee. I totally agree with her—this is a key message from the debate and I hope to develop it

with all members contributing—that we want every part of Scotland to benefit from the bid fund.

We can have conferences, events, associations and meetings in every part of Scotland. They need not involve thousands of delegates; they can involve a small number. The bid fund is for all of Scotland, and one of the key purposes of this debate is to get that message across and to get all members, across all the parties, to take that message across Scotland.

Margo MacDonald: Although the bid fund is excellent and good use of it has already been made, an internal programme of explanation and information for the smaller people in rural areas is needed. I do not think that they know about it, so a wee programme is needed.

Fergus Ewing: I am happy to agree that we want to do more to spread information about the fund. That is why I travelled recently to Aberdeen, which, as Labour's amendment says, has had success. I met Barney Crockett there. I will meet colleagues in Edinburgh and engage with colleagues in local government in many parts of Scotland to pursue the matter.

Margo MacDonald is absolutely right: we need to extend information about the fund. After all, it is relatively new: it was launched only in March. Part of the purpose of the debate is to promulgate information about its success. I am not claiming any particular great credit for that; the credit goes to the people who organise, arrange and secure the conferences and put in a power of work. In particular, I pay tribute to Scott Taylor of Glasgow City Marketing Bureau and his team; John Sharkey of the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre and his team; Hans Rissmann OBE of the Edinburgh International Conference Centre; Lucy Bird of Marketing Edinburgh; the chambers of commerce, which play a great role; my friend Gordon Matheson of Glasgow City Council, with whom I have worked closely on these matters; Amanda McMillan of Glasgow airport, who will roll out the red carpet for conference leaders; and those in universities who play a key role in bringing many conferences to Scotland. People who work in the royal colleges have influence and can persuade their colleagues in that type of organisation that Edinburgh, Glasgow and other places would be great locations for them to meet, celebrate and discuss.

I have not covered everything that I meant to cover—I have eight to 12 pages that we will leave for another time.

Members: Aw!

Fergus Ewing: I am sorry to disappoint members. I very much look forward to the debate, and have pleasure in moving the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that the Scottish tourism industry delivers over £2.9 billion annually to the Scottish gross value added; welcomes the contribution made to this achievement by the business tourism sector; acknowledges the efforts made by the VisitScotland's Ambassador Programme to boost Scotland's profile across the world; notes that, in addition to the direct economic impact from conferences and events, they also enhance Scotland's credentials as a place to invest, study, live, work and visit again; further notes the successes to date in winning additional events with the Conference Bid Fund, and encourages stakeholders of all sizes to make greater use of the match-funding available from the Conference Bid Fund to win even further business for Scotland.

14:57

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I thank the minister for his opening speech. Despite the disappearing coin trick, the shameless playing to the gallery and even the two caveats on Labour's amendment, I welcome his comments and his support for our amendment.

I think that there is consensus around the chamber, as there has been in our two recent debates on tourism, and around Scotland that we need to do more to recognise the importance of tourism, and business tourism in particular. In a week that has brought rather gloomy and depressing news about business prospects and the Scottish economy generally, it is good to have an opportunity in the Scottish Parliament to talk about an area in which there is clearly great potential for growth and which has managed to at least somewhat buck the downward trend during the recession.

The closure of Comet follows a number of high street retailers going under, and Vion's decision to close its whole United Kingdom operation merely adds salt to the wound following its decision to halt production at Hall's of Broxburn, with the loss of 1,700 jobs. It is more important than ever that we respond to such developments effectively, with a renewed focus on employment from the Government and Parliament and an emphasis on diversifying and supporting our manufacturing sector. We should also respond to the difficulties by putting an even greater emphasis on ensuring that we make the most of expanding sectors, such as the business tourism sector.

It is worth reminding ourselves—as the minister did—of the importance of the tourism industry to Scotland already. We have had a number of debates recently about tourism in general. The Scottish Government's motion highlights the £2.9 billion in value added that tourism is now worth to the Scottish economy. It is particularly notable that business tourism accounts for 20 per cent of total tourism expenditure in Scotland—some £878

million per year. Some 2.6 million business trips were made to Scotland in 2011.

Perhaps as important is the fact that business visitors spend almost twice as much as traditional holiday visitors when they are here and their custom is less prone to seasonal highs and lows, making it important for the hotel sector in enabling it to utilise capacity all year round. There is also the incentive that those business tourists may return as holidaymakers at some point in the future.

I am sure that we are all acutely aware of the importance of competing effectively in the main overseas markets: America, Germany, the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, France and so on. However, it is worth highlighting that the rest of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, accounts for three quarters of the total tourism expenditure. Without straying into our political differences over the constitution, I suggest that the union dividend is an important point to bear in mind.

I welcome the news from the minister that the conference bid fund has already started to attract new business tourism to Scotland. The scheme, which is match funded by Scotland's cities, is a very good example of collaborative working between our major cities and VisitScotland that is already showing results.

Our cities have been the driving force in attracting business visitors. Yes, business tourism has been somewhat affected by the financial recession but it is recovering and is expected to grow, unlike many other areas. I single out Glasgow as being at the forefront of that growth, as it is the number 1 city for business tourism outside London. That has happened not by accident, but because of strong and committed leadership by the city council. Gordon Matheson, the leader of Glasgow City Council, has estimated that, in the first six months of the current financial year alone, conventions and business tourism have brought £120 million into Glasgow's economy—the same amount that was achieved in the whole of the previous year. Without wishing to be overly controversial or to spoil the consensus, I note that one of the budgetary proposals made by the combined opposition in Glasgow earlier this year would have reduced funding to Glasgow City Marketing Bureau and ceased the air route development fund, which has brought so many new flights into and out of Glasgow airport.

I am delighted to see the city and the Government working together to make the most of the potential that lies in the hosting of the Commonwealth games in 2014. The hydrodome next to the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre is just one of the many new facilities that will undoubtedly add to Glasgow's attractiveness

over the coming years and which will, I hope, be part of a very successful Commonwealth games legacy. Arguably the biggest addition that we could now make as a country to the success of Glasgow as a city and as a business tourism destination would be a rail link to Glasgow airport. Modern business travellers expect such connections as a matter of course, and it reflects poorly not just on Glasgow but on the whole country that neither Edinburgh nor Glasgow has a direct rail connection into the city centre. Investment in transport infrastructure is vital not just to bringing business visitors into our country, but to taking those same visitors to more rural destinations so that our whole country can benefit from any increase in the number of business visitors.

I want to mention Aberdeen, too, as there is no doubt that the incoming administration has given a huge signal of its commitment by signing off the £26.2 million that was the accumulated debt of the Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre. That proposal will see that historical debt cleared, allowing the centre to focus on the future and develop new ways in which to bring conferences and events to Aberdeen.

Following yesterday's debate, it is worth noting that the proposed rises in air passenger duty could act as a real disincentive to business tourism and tourism generally in Scotland. Airports that are located not just in Scotland but in the north of England are clearly at a disadvantage when it comes to APD, and the fact that the tax is higher in Scotland than in other comparable countries will not increase our attractiveness to foreign let alone domestic visitors.

I return to some of the reasons why Scotland and our cities are such attractive destinations. We can talk about their heritage, their physical beauty and their accessibility, but it often comes down to the level of service, the friendliness and the hospitality that we offer. I spoke at length on the issue in our previous debate on tourism, in June. Glasgow's hospitality is legendary and I hope that we are able to build on that reputation while moving away from the association with alcohol consumption that is often present in some minds.

However, we still need to work on certain areas. On our way back from holiday this year, my wife and I arrived at Glasgow airport first thing in the morning—it was the morning after a fire at the airport and we had been delayed. We stopped off at a 24-hour garage in Paisley to buy breakfast. My wife went to pay for the goods and asked whether the shop had any orange juice. The one-word response from across the counter was, "Dilutin?" I can interpret that as a friendly response, but perhaps some of us need to work on our people skills if we are to make the Scottish

welcome everything that it should be. That chap clearly had not been to the Commonwealth games Disney-style charm school that was talked about in a previous debate.

Despite the tourism industry's huge importance to Scotland and the potential for growth in employment, the idea of a career in tourism is still not attractive to many school and college leavers. Young men, in particular, still talk about training to be a welder rather than a waiter or hotel manager. We need to do more to demonstrate the opportunities that lie outwith the traditional picture of work in Scotland. There are many good examples of college courses and training, but it is unfortunate that the industry can still be associated with low rates of pay and with seasonal unemployment and insecurity. We need to challenge that.

Margo MacDonald: I speak as a proud grandmother, whose eldest grandson just this week started as an apprentice in the hotel industry. He is a graduate and he is never going to get a job in teaching, so he is in the next best thing.

Ken Macintosh: Hear hear. I echo the member's remarks. There is a difficulty, in that attitudes in Scotland are perhaps still a couple of decades behind. The industry has changed and tourism is a far more important and substantial industry than it has ever been, but sometimes our stereotypes of what to expect are forged in previous generations.

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): Does the member agree that hospitality should be regarded as a profession, as is the case in France, and should be treated as such by schools, careers services and further and higher education?

Ken Macintosh: Indeed. That is behind the whole idea of boosting the industry's status. We can do that in a number of ways, including through schools and careers services. I was making the point that the industry has a reputation for offering low pay, and tackling rates of pay would do much to overturn the image that I was talking about.

The Government is still pursuing a target of 50 per cent expansion in the tourism industry, but if we are to have a remote chance of achieving that goal, one of the biggest contributors will be an expansion in the number of business visitors. That can happen if Government and cities work together. Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh have shown the way and I commend the leadership of those cities' councils and the example that they have set.

I move amendment S4M-04886.2, to insert at end:

“; notes the value of business tourism in terms of promoting growth and dealing with issues of seasonality; recognises the key role of Scotland’s cities in developing business tourism, for example in Glasgow, where the city council has worked hard to achieve the position of largest destination for business tourism in the UK outside London, and in Aberdeen, where the city council has, in 2012, paid off the accumulated £26.2 million debt of the Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre in order to continue to grow international conference business in the city; notes the importance of good transport links in helping to sustain and build on this success, and calls on the Scottish Government and local authorities to continue to work together positively to replicate this success across Scotland.”

15:08

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I welcome the debate and I welcome the conference bid fund. I also thank the minister for his briefing earlier today, which I found helpful. We will support the Government motion and the Labour amendment. Indeed, in the spirit of consensual politics I will say that if Tavish Scott’s amendment had been selected for debate we would have supported that, too.

I commend Fergus Ewing for turning £1 into £53—John Swinney, watch your back. Fergus Ewing can perhaps expect a call from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank or even Mrs Merkel herself. Well done, Fergus. I fully support what he said.

Of the international association conferences that are held in the UK, some 28 per cent are hosted in Scotland, so we are punching well above our weight. We should acknowledge that England is not only our closest neighbour, but is our best market for business tourism and spending in Scotland.

The minister said that 40 per cent of visits are return visits. That must be worth the investment, for the huge multiplier effect.

As is usual in preparing for such a debate, I went to VisitScotland’s website, which says that the business tourism unit works closely with the convention bureaux in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee. The minister said that conferences, conventions, meetings and business tourism are for all parts of Scotland. I remind VisitScotland that there is life beyond the big cities. Aviemore and Inverness are excellent examples of places that can host major conferences; the Scottish open is held at Castle Stuart near Inverness, not only because of the stunning and wonderful golf course there, but because the area can accommodate all the estimated 30,000-plus visitors. I am sure that, as the constituency MSP for Inverness and Nairn, the minister would never dare to tell the Inverness common good fund how to spend its money. However, I am sure that he welcomes—as I do—

the fact that funding from that fund has been allocated to attracting conferences to Inverness. A maximum grant of £17,500 is available for any single application. I trust that the fund will work with VisitScotland on the issue.

In evidence to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, Gavin Ellis was right to raise the issue of investment in the transport infrastructure of roads, rail and air routes. I heard what was said about improvements in train journey times from Inverness to Edinburgh, and I would welcome any improvement, but I have been a regular traveller since 1999 and I have not yet seen one minute taken off the journey time. However, I believe that that will happen and, when it happens, I will welcome it.

I trust that the same approach as was taken to business tourism following the Olympics will be taken in relation to the Commonwealth games. We have moved beyond silo thinking into looking at the advantages that can be gained. I trust that, in summing up, the minister will tell us what will happen when we have that wonderful opportunity.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

Does Mary Scanlon accept that people thought that they could not go to London during the Olympics because the Olympics were on? We do not want such a message; we want people to come to Glasgow at the same time as the Commonwealth games are on.

Mary Scanlon: There are lessons to learn from the Olympics. The lessons are 90 per cent positive, but we must also look at any deterrents.

To maintain and increase our competitiveness in business tourism, we need constantly to improve what is on offer. The market is global and competitive, and we need to respond to business needs. The Deloitte annual business traveller survey shows that complementary high-speed internet in rooms is important, given that two out of three respondents said that they worked in their hotel rooms. The survey said that 61 per cent of respondents

“expect more from hotels with regards to amenities and services”.

I have no doubt that broadband speeds and mobile phone coverage are also major factors in business tourism, although they were not mentioned in the survey.

At a briefing earlier today, my colleague Murdo Fraser raised the issue of extending business tourists’ stays in Scotland. In our debate in June, I mentioned the excellent Sutherland trail and the problems that visitors had experienced in finding information about it on VisitScotland’s website. The minister’s response was:

"I am pleased that VisitScotland has a dedicated walking section on its website as well as ... other initiatives".—[*Official Report*, 21 June 2012; c 10464.]

In my naivety, I welcomed that comment, but I was disappointed to see that that section of VisitScotland's website breaks down Scotland into north, central and south areas—I am holding up a copy of the website's map—and to see that Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles and three quarters of the Highlands are omitted. The website covers 23 walks, from the Annandale way to the Moray coast, and it links to a glossy document to entice visitors, which is entitled "Discover Scotland's Great Trails ... there's a surprise around every corner". That is, every corner except those in the north of Scotland. Will the minister look at that again?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): You need to start to conclude.

Mary Scanlon: Business tourism in Islay, with its distilleries, is first class. I appreciate that business tourism is a vital ingredient in the economy of the Highlands and the whole of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to the open debate. Members have six minutes for speeches, but we are very tight for time so interventions must be contained within those six minutes.

15:14

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): In beginning a speech in a debate about tourism, it is only proper that I first pay tribute to the man who is credited with single-handedly starting the Scottish tourism industry: Walter Scott. I am sure that he would be more than surprised to know that he founded an industry that now supports about 10 per cent of employment in Scotland and which, even in these dark days of recession, grew last year at a rate of 9 per cent. When much of the rest of the economy is flatlining, that is a very healthy rate of growth. Tourism is yet another industry in which Scotland bucks the economic trends and outperforms the rest of the UK, and it takes more than 20 per cent of the overall UK tourism spend.

In one way or another, every person in Scotland benefits from this dynamic industry. That is why all members of this Parliament should support it and consider themselves as tourism ambassadors for Scotland and talk up Scotland's many virtues.

If there is a segment of the tourism industry that deserves special consideration, it is business tourism. Business tourism leads to many other benefits, such as business contacts and business contracts, repeat visits, and export and investment opportunities for Scotland. It is worth

contemplating why Scotland is so successful in that sector. It seems to me that something about Scotland inspires creativity. It was not an accident that the industrial revolution started here with James Watt's steam engine. It was not an accident that the enlightenment started in Edinburgh and that Adam Smith founded modern economics here in Scotland, which was a precursor to the modern business landscape that stretches across the globe. Those things were not accidents. There is something about Scotland, something about our landscapes and something about our people and our manner of discourse and dialogue—although not always in this chamber. There is something about Scotland that inspires thought, and which inspires creativity. Business, if it is to be successful, must be all about creativity, because creativity leads to innovation and innovation is the key to success in business, as it is the key to our economic success as a nation.

What better place to refresh tired minds and to rediscover a passion for success than Scotland? That is why business tourism is growing in Scotland. So let us start talking Scotland up, and let us tell the world that we want to do more business.

Scotland's business is no longer centred exclusively in our cities. I am thinking of the biomara project at Dunstaffnage in Oban, where we lead the world in marine research with a project that aims to capture the vast productive powers of our oceans in producing biofuel. Think of the business spin-off that will be engendered by that project.

I am thinking of the European Marine Energy Centre on Orkney, where we lead the world in marine renewables research and development. That has led to inquiries from Korea, Japan and the US to teach them about marine renewables. As people from other countries learn from us, we will learn from them. Learning from each other and doing business with each other go hand in hand, for business is about mutual benefit and the best of business is often centred on friendships.

As Mary Scanlon said, we must always strive to improve our competitiveness and we must address the impediments to this successful sector. Dr Mike Cantlay, chairman of VisitScotland, appeared before the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee only a couple of weeks ago. He said that inbound air passenger duty

"is not about austerity; it is lunacy."

He also said that the UK is

"one of only 14 countries that apply the full rate of VAT on restaurant meals; the average for the rest of the EU is 8.8 per cent, not 20 per cent."—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 12 September 2012; c 1897, 1896.]

We have the second-highest rate of VAT on accommodation in Europe; the average for the rest of Europe is 10.3 per cent, as opposed to 20 per cent. I agree with Mary Scanlon that we need to increase our competitiveness; reducing VAT would be a good way of doing so. I am forced to wonder why, in the face of all economic wisdom, the UK Government persists in overtaxing this area of industry and, indeed, any area of industry in which Scotland does well or enjoys an advantage. The answer to that question is self-evident. Fortunately a solution is almost at hand.

15:20

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this topic and to discuss how we can make Scotland the world-class destination that we all know it can be.

This is not the first debate on tourism in which I have participated. However, it is the first that I can remember that has focused specifically on business tourism, which is a potential source of growth in the economy, a key component of any successful events strategy and another way in which we can showcase the very best of Scotland to the world.

Exhibitions, trade fairs, meetings and conferences, product launches, corporate functions and even corporate hospitality at big events, from pop concerts to cup finals, all bring people together. Those gatherings not only generate income for local economies, but bring a wider benefit, because the deals and transactions that are done and the contacts that are made can contribute to the growth and success of businesses further down the line.

Many of the critical factors behind the success of business tourism are not any different to the factors behind the success of the tourism industry as a whole, even in these difficult times for the economy. We all want to give all visitors to our country a good Scottish welcome because we want them to come back, and we want everyone in the service sector who deals with the public—from taxi drivers to hotel porters—to do their bit to make people comfortable and to project a positive image of the country.

We have to get the marketing strategy right, not just at national level but at local level. As I have said before, VisitLanarkshire.com is the product of a strong collaboration between the visitor accommodation sector and visitor attractions, and it is a model of partnership working from which other parts of Scotland could learn.

We must ensure that our workforce has the right mix of skills not just in customer service and hospitality, but in events management, advertising

and modern languages. The Confederation of British Industry and Scottish Enterprise have both warned that, because Scotland is falling behind in language education, we are losing out on income and investment, which could be costing the Scottish economy as much as £500 million per year. We must raise our game on modern languages. I welcome the suggestion that foreign languages should be introduced to children at an early age in education, and that an additional language should be introduced as they progress through school. We must be conscious that, if we are to shift the focus of our exporters towards the BRIC—Brazil, Russia, India and China—nations and other emerging economies, our language courses and wider understanding of foreign cultures must become more diverse. We will always teach the major European languages such as French and Spanish, but the case for teaching other languages such as Portuguese and Russian is stronger than ever.

A world-class destination needs world-class infrastructure; connectivity in Scotland and between Scotland and other key destinations is central to our future prosperity. There must be joined-up thinking in our approach to tourism and to transport, as there is in many other countries.

High speed 2 will reduce journey times between Scotland and London, and a high-speed connection between Glasgow and Edinburgh will be a great boost to one of our most valuable transport corridors. However, I remain unconvinced that the reductions in the Edinburgh to Glasgow rail improvement programme amount to savings; they are, in fact, cuts that total £350 million, which will mean that electrification will be put on hold and critical enhancements to the capacity of the rail line will be scrapped. If we are serious—

John Mason: Will the member give way?

Margaret McCulloch: Let me continue.

If we are serious about developing this high-value sector and realising all its potential, we need transport links that sit at the top of the league and are up there with the best in the world.

There are real legacy benefits to having a strong and competitive business tourism industry. Venues that are central to the success of business tourism have helped to regenerate city centres across the United Kingdom, breathing new life into spaces that were neglected after the decline of traditional industries. Big national events can produce substantial gains that last longer than the events themselves. I worked on the Glasgow garden festival in the 1980s. It was a great event and it marked a real turning point for the city, but for a number of reasons—not least the economic problems of the late 1980s—much of the land

remained derelict until relatively recently. As we develop the venues and the infrastructure that we need to grow the business tourism end of the industry, we must be prepared to invest and to innovate to secure lasting benefits for our economy.

As the Government does, I recognise the growing contribution that business tourism is making to the Scottish economy. Business tourism can add value in all seasons and in all kinds of ways, and it can leave a legacy of regeneration, growth and new opportunities. The challenge for the Government is to support the sector through these tough times and to plan for better times by helping Scotland to secure the skills, the infrastructure and the investment that we need if we are truly to be one of the best destinations in the world.

15:26

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): It will come as no surprise to the minister that I will focus most of my attention on the north-east of Scotland—in particular Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

John Mason: No!

Dennis Robertson: Well, yes.

First, however, I say that I would love to invest £1 with the minister; I hope that I would get a good return at the end of the week.

The north-east of Scotland, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire have a fantastic story to tell. When we are looking at business tourism, there is probably no better place in Scotland. We have infrastructure, with Aberdeen airport actually seeing growth in its business over the past year or so, and it continues to grow. The plans to develop the airport into an airport city are taking shape. We will have new hotel accommodation and office accommodation, and perhaps some shops. The aim is to attract the business community. We have a business hub in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, and the energy sector is at the centre of that hub. It brings people from all parts of the world including North America and the middle east, and recently we have had interest from China.

The city has a lot to offer, but in the periphery—the shire—we have just as much, if not more to offer, with the scenery, the beauty and so on. When companies bring in people who are considering future investment in Scotland, and particularly in the north-east, we need to encourage those companies to ensure that people get a feel for the country and its culture, as well. It is extremely important that people understand that Scotland is not about bagpipes, kilts and shortbread—although if they visit Huntly, they can

visit the Dean's factory and get probably the best shortbread in Scotland.

Mary Scanlon: Given the enormous demand for hotel beds in the north-east, particularly in Aberdeen, does the member welcome Mr Trump's development and the extension of accommodation facilities in the north-east?

Dennis Robertson: I want to stay positive. Let me say that any future development is also a welcome development.

We have some fantastic hotel accommodation. In royal Deeside, that accommodation probably sells itself, but we also have fantastic facilities in areas such as Strathdon. There is an area called Lost; it is a place to be found. I assure members that it is a place where those who enjoy walking in the Cairngorms will have a fantastic time.

This debate is about encouraging business back into our communities and about the offer of business tourism. In September, the minister stated to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee—I ask him to forgive me for rounding up the figures—that investment of about £322,000 was estimated to have a return of £37 million. My maths is probably not as good as the minister's and I stand to be corrected, but I think that that is a 56:1 return.

We have fantastic facilities and a wonderful culture—and, in truth, we have an open door for business. That business will bring growth, which in turn will engender more opportunities for the people of Scotland. However, when we take our message across the world, whether it be to China, India, Brazil, Africa or the middle east, we must ensure that the people who come to Scotland get the hospitality that they deserve.

The minister mentioned Stephen Leckie, who for many years now has been at the forefront of demands for a reduction in VAT for the hotel sector. The issue must be looked at urgently. Indeed, I sincerely hope that in the forthcoming budget the Chancellor of the Exchequer will consider reducing VAT for the hotel and restaurant sector.

APD, which was the subject of yesterday's debate in the chamber and has been mentioned this afternoon, should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Of course, if we wait until 2014, all powers will be devolved and we will be able to address the problem ourselves.

Remaining, I hope, on a consensual note—

Members: Ha! [*Laughter.*]

Dennis Robertson: I hope that by opening the door to Scotland we can encourage business communities to walk through it and enjoy what we have to offer.

15:31

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): As a business tourist for 30 years, I can say that I have considerable experience of business tourism. In fact, given the amount of business travel that I undertook in the past, I could easily have qualified as a secret shopper.

As for how pleasurable my experience as a business tourist was, I have to say that things were very mixed. Perhaps I can share with the chamber some of the key factors that I and my then colleagues valued on a visit. Given that no one wanted to waste any spare time, which was always precious and at a premium, we first of all preferred a hotel in the centre of town but not too far from the airport for better access to facilities. Secondly, we liked to have quality restaurants and pubs nearby. Thirdly, we liked tourist attractions to be available. It was really good if they were close by, so that we could take a few photographs to prove to our spouses that we had actually been there. Fourthly, we looked for availability of tourist shops or shops with local content, because we needed to bring back some tourist tat for spouses and family. As that was often done somewhat hurriedly, a good choice was important.

Scotland would have been a popular choice for a visit, as it ticks all the basic boxes. It is really unfortunate that only once in all those years did I attend an event in Edinburgh—and, alas, as I was already living here, it was not the same.

Business tourists tend to spend more money than leisure tourists. Because they are on expenses for accommodation, transport and food, they feel less inhibited by costs. They also tend to be less discriminating because they have less time to look around and to decide on purchases or which local destinations to visit. As a result, it is not surprising that the spend by business tourists is more than one and a half times that of leisure tourists.

Scotland benefits from business tourism by £878 million per annum, which is up an impressive 8 per cent on 2010, and such tourism itself amounts to 20 per cent of the total tourism spend in Scotland. Given that, it is important to understand the drivers behind business tourism, if Scotland is to continue to grow and benefit from the sector. After all, sustainable tourism is a key growth sector for the Scottish Government.

To my mind, business tourism has, broadly, two key elements, the first of which relates to conferences and conventions. We need to sell Scotland as a great place to have a conference on the basis of price—given the constraints on company budgets during this period of financial austerity—and on the basis of the personal

preferences of those organising and attending. The second element relates to business travellers, who typically extend their visits by a day or two to look around or, at the very least, squeeze out time during the working day to view very local sights. We must invest in both elements, particularly in the main cities—Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen—where business tourists end up. In both key elements, we need to invest in our tourist infrastructure, and I am pleased that the Scottish Government is doing so.

I will give some examples. Historic Scotland offers its historic facilities for hire as event centres. That has been happening for many years, and business tourism has been targeted since 1998. Historic Scotland has consistently invested in those facilities.

VisitScotland promotes Scotland as a venue for conferences and conventions and, in 2010-11, generated business to the value of £121 million. It has also benefited from the new conference bid fund that Fergus Ewing announced in March 2012. The fund offers £2 million over the next three years and aims to make Scotland more competitive in the international conference market. EventScotland promotes sporting and cultural events and invested £3.7 million in the events industry in 2010-11. That generated some £57.5 million in additional revenue for our economy. Scottish Enterprise gives advice and support to more than 100 key tourism businesses.

I welcome the investment and effort that are being focused on what is an important sector. I have already touched on the fact that we are in the midst of a period of financial austerity. Despite that, it is encouraging to see some indications of continuing recovery in the business tourism market—even if it is slow and a little uneven.

There is little doubt that the recovery may remain fragile until such time as the general economic situation shows more solid signs of improvement. Cost may remain a key factor and margins may suffer as a result. Therefore, it is important that the Scottish market's stakeholders continue to provide good value for money and to invest in the sector. We have many competitors in the market—the rest of the UK, the USA, Germany and Spain are the main ones. However, Scotland can and will compete successfully. Our track record in the tourism industry is second to none.

When times are hard, there are challenges, but there are also opportunities. If we continue to keep a strong focus on the important business tourism sector, Scotland will continue to prosper and expand as a destination for conferences, conventions and business travellers in general.

Scotland has a great deal to offer delegates and business visitors. It has world-class venues,

spectacular scenery, food and drink that is of fantastic quality, historic sites, golf and much more. I commend the work that has been done and is being done, and look forward to seeing the success that those efforts deserve.

15:37

Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): I ask myself why I am speaking in a debate about business tourism. I asked some people earlier, “I am from Inverclyde—why am I in the debate at all?” but I put my mind to it.

I am here to recognise the potential of tourism in the widest sense for a community that was based on traditional industries. As we know—actually, we cannot believe it—Greenock has turned into a gateway to Scotland for more than 60,000 passengers every year. We are constrained only by the physical resources. We have had positive discussions with Scottish Government ministers about a bid to extend the quay and the quayside. This week, I had an update from Scottish Enterprise and the urban regeneration company on that project, which should increase the number of passengers.

The passengers flow out of the area, because they come to visit Glasgow and Edinburgh, but there are significant benefits for us locally. We look for a bit in return. We are the gateway. The visitors flow into Glasgow and other places and we will never be able to compete with the bigger venues for conferences, but we ask Glasgow in particular to recognise the wider offer.

The experience that people have in Scotland should not be bound to the cities. We should make connections out into places such as Inverclyde where, 20 minutes away, people can sail on the Firth of Clyde in conditions that Chay Blyth considers some of the best sailing in the world. It is less than an hour from the SECC.

People could come down and have lunch on one of those massive cruise liners that come and visit. They could also visit the film set of “Waterloo Road”, which is one of the most popular dramas in the UK, with 5 million viewers every week. The important point is that we recognise that getting people into the area transforms their mindset that this is an old shipyard town and allows them to see the area’s potential for the future. Of course, there is also the effect on the sense of pride of local people, who will welcome visitors to the area.

Finally, we are also giving notice that we want to break into the small conference business market. The new Beacon arts centre, which has been supported by successive Governments here in the Scottish Parliament and by the lottery, will open shortly. With that 500-seat theatre, we will have an opportunity to work in that market and to make a

claim for small conferences. Maybe a new hotel will spring up to support that initiative and will work alongside the existing budget hotels as well as Gleddoch House, which has all the leisure facilities—golf and everything else—with spectacular views over the Clyde. That is all only 20 minutes from Glasgow airport.

Although I recognise that we will never compete with the big boys, it is important that people recognise the wider offer and the facilities that are on their doorstep that will enhance the experience of those who attend conferences. Although my comments today might be ambitious or speculative, I think that I can say with certainty that all those who have had the experience of visiting Inverclyde will recognise that there is nothing uncertain about the warm welcome that visitors will get when they arrive in Inverclyde.

15:42

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): While I am delighted to speak in today’s debate, I regret having missed yesterday’s debate on air passenger duty—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Brodie, sorry, could you turn your microphone round? It is not picking you up very well.

Chic Brodie: Along with other members of the Public Petitions Committee, yesterday I visited the National Assembly for Wales, which was also, coincidentally, debating the effect of APD on tourism. There is no doubt that APD—along with VAT, the lack of direct flights and the visa shambles—militates against success in tourism generally and business tourism particularly and defies some of the good work that our tourism agencies do.

Talking with some Chinese businessmen recently, I was appalled to be told that, when seven of them applied to come to Scotland on business, the embassy restricted their quota to five. Of course, none of them then came. Notwithstanding the consensual nature of the debate, I have to admit that I smiled yesterday when reading the story about Areva coming to Scotland, on which the Prime Minister, Mr Cameron, said:

“I am determined that Britain competes and thrives in the global race”.

Well, he could help our business tourism by asking his Chancellor of the Exchequer to reduce APD and VAT drastically, by asking his Foreign Secretary to sort out the visa shambles and by asking his Secretary of State for Transport to insist that the transport review considers direct flights to Scotland.

Having worked for several multinationals and run eight companies across Europe, I know that it is critical to business tourism that we increase the global corporate footprint in Scotland. We need more corporate headquarters. On that, I can only praise the great work of Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Development International and the efforts that they have made so far to attract such companies. I have no doubt that, under the umbrella of the strategic economic forum, there will be even greater co-ordination and cohesion among Scottish Enterprise, SDI and VisitScotland in attracting more businesses—and, by default, more business tourists—to Scotland.

In my careers with NCR, IBM, Digital, Wang UK and Tandem UK, I well remember the influx of colleagues from the US, Japan and Europe, many of whom brought their spouses and extended their stays, and even continued to come back after they had left the companies. I well remember Tandem taking over a third of Gleneagles hotel. I do not remember quite as well the night at the Tullibardine distillery, although I am sure I enjoyed it. The attraction of corporates and their subsidiary units and manufacturing entities must be an overarching objective for business and business tourism. As it was in silicon glen, let it be in renewables, food and drink, and life sciences.

We must build on the estimated £900 million of expenditure from business tourism in 2011, which was 19 per cent of total tourism expenditure. Aside from the volume, the business tourism sector is important because it is estimated that business tourists spend one and a half times what leisure tourists spend. It is important that we have in place the processes and information and communication technology systems that crystallise the numbers, so that we know exactly how we are growing.

As the minister said, our success is contingent on the joint work of VisitScotland's business tourism unit, our universities, local authorities, regional tourism forums and the private sector to stimulate activity and build infrastructure to meet our national objective. Although I applaud the current 53 applications to the conference bid fund and I recognise the efforts of Glasgow City Council and Scott Taylor and his marketing team in securing outstanding conferences for Glasgow, particularly in the life sciences and medicine, I suggest that our business tourism cannot be city-centric only and nor can it be product-centric. According to the business tourism unit, outside the main cities, only 31 places in Scotland can seat more than 500 people in theatre style.

We will be successful in our pursuit of making Scotland a global business tourism centre for the corporates that I mentioned, for conferences, conventions, sales achievement programmes, exhibitions and trade fairs—I could go on—only if

we are ready to beat the global competition. That means spreading our reach to show our service worth, natural resources and assets, including outwith the cities. It means increasing connectivity and business tourism attractions in the Borders and the Highlands and Islands. The phrase that comes to mind is, "Shovel ready, service ready." We have good and, in some cases, excellent tourism and business tourism agencies. I am delighted to support the Government's motion and the amendment.

15:48

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I agree entirely with Mr Brodie's final point about the importance of business tourism being spread rather more widely than just Glasgow, Edinburgh and Gleneagles, good as they are. I will give the minister a concrete example of an action that his Government could take that would help not just Shetland, but Orkney, the Western Isles, the Argyll islands and Wick and the far north—all areas with which he is familiar. That is to reintroduce the business component of the air discount scheme. That was a good scheme that was introduced some years ago by a previous Government and continued by Stewart Stevenson, the first Scottish National Party transport minister in 2007. It is to Mr Stevenson's great credit that he ensured that the scheme continued. It was approved by the European Commission and provided a 40 per cent discount on what I am sure the minister will recognise are pretty high fares across the Highlands and Islands.

I was grateful to Mr Stevenson for continuing the scheme. His decision was eminently sensible. However, since then, the Government has changed its position on the business component of the scheme. Had the Government cited finance as the main reason for that, I would have had some sympathy. Although I might not have agreed and might have argued for a different set of priorities, I certainly would accept any minister's right to make that judgment call.

However, what I found somewhat difficult to take was the use of the European Commission as a convenient way of saying that the scheme had to change. That is not the case now and it was not the case then. Perhaps I could gently ask Fergus Ewing to bring his considerable talents to bear on his colleagues in another part of Government to see whether that scheme could be reintroduced, as it would make a considerable difference to the areas of Scotland that I have mentioned and would be in line with the point that Mr Brodie and other members have made about ensuring that the conference and business tourism market can develop not only in our great cities and resorts

such as Gleneagles and St Andrews but in other parts of the country.

I commend Mr Robertson's remarks about what the oil and gas industry means for business tourism. I share his perspective, not only about Aberdeen—although it is close to my heart, as I have spent years going through it in order to catch a boat or a plane—but about other places that are involved in the industry. Certainly, it brings a huge amount of business tourism to Shetland. Mr Robertson might agree with those who note that getting a taxi or, more to the point, a hotel bed in Aberdeen during a normal working week is nigh on impossible. Occasionally, when I have been trying to get home and not managed it because the flight has been cancelled, I have been put up in all parts of Scotland instead of close to Dyce, in order to catch that hellishly—excuse me, Presiding Officer, that ghastly—early flight home on a Friday or Saturday morning.

I bring to the minister's attention the advertising industry's increasing use of locations in Scotland. I confess that I was pretty ignorant of that until Friday night, when I found out that a major mobile phone company had been filming an advert in Shetland for the past week. Some 45 members of the production crew had been staying in three hotels in the north of Shetland, bringing six trucks of kit with them from London. I can only guess at the spend that that represents—not only in the pub in which I met them on Friday night but in hotels and restaurants and with local people who provided everything from quad bikes to trailers to take the kit around the west of Shetland. Apparently, all that is to produce something that will last less than 30 seconds and involves ponies breakdancing. That is not a concept with which I am familiar, and I can only recommend that members check YouTube when the advertisement appears. However, believe me, if it brings money into my community, I am allowed to endorse ponies breakdancing.

More seriously, I commend the minister's use of statistics, particularly the point that he made about 40 per cent of business tourists returning. The other numbers that jumped out at me—they were either in the report that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee published on Monday or in a report that I had something to do with five or six years ago, when the previous Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee conducted its inquiry into tourism—were that 28 per cent of all international association conferences that are held in the UK are hosted by Scotland and that Edinburgh and Glasgow are second only to London in the UK in terms of the number of international association conferences. As the minister said, that suggests that there is a huge potential for growth for Scotland.

Of course, that relates to transport. I was taken with Ken Macintosh's observations about the air route development fund, which has been used by Glasgow City Council and which Mr Ewing will remember from a previous iteration of his career. I appreciate that there were European challenges to the use of the fund but, in fairness to Glasgow City Council, if it has found a way around that, I can only commend it, because the argument that has been used for years by business lobby organisations—indeed, by the kind of companies that Mr Brodie mentioned—is that direct air links into Scotland, avoiding the hubs of London, Amsterdam and Frankfurt, would be enormously beneficial for the development of business tourism.

Finally, I ask Mr Ewing to ensure that, the next time he comes through passport control at Edinburgh airport, he thinks about working hard on the point that Mr Macintosh made about a nice welcome to Scotland.

15:54

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): It has been a consensual debate so far, which has sometimes been quite humorous. I recommend that Tavish Scott have a wee chat later with my colleague Chic Brodie as, when Tavish Scott mentioned breakdancing ponies, Chic Brodie said that he had one.

We know that Scotland has a tremendous amount to offer between its people, the golf, the whisky, the food and drink, the cultural events, the bagpipes and the tartan—Dennis Robertson take note—and the sporting events, including the world-class sailing off the west coast. In that regard, we cannot forget the current constitutional debate, which is certainly putting Scotland under the gaze of the wider world and is, I think, making Scotland a more interesting and fascinating place for people to come and visit.

We have already heard a number of the facts and statistics, so I will not go over all the ground again. However, it is important to highlight a couple of the points that we heard earlier. VisitScotland estimates that the MICE market brings in around £870 million, which is 19 per cent of our overall business tourism figure, and that 28 per cent of all international association conferences that are held in the UK are held in Scotland.

Neil Brownlee, head of VisitScotland's business tourism unit, said:

"Scotland has so much to offer delegates in terms of our world class venues, our spectacular scenes, our fantastic food and drink, our history, our golf and so much more."

I could not have put it better myself. We have the product. We have some world-class

establishments and have improving service provision at all levels. We also have the people with the drive and passion to continue to improve the tourism product, particularly the business tourism product, and certainly none more so than Stephen Leckie, who is the chair of the Scottish tourism leadership group and of the Scottish Tourism Alliance. His infectious desire is to make Scottish tourism the best—not just the best for a small country. His foreword to the refreshed Scottish tourism strategy—“Tourism Scotland 2020”—highlights the focus on the sector, stating that the strategy is

“for the industry, by the industry.”

Those comments are apt and highlight that it is a bottom-up strategy rather than a top-down one.

The tourism leadership group, which produced the refreshed strategy, and the Scottish Tourism Alliance, which will monitor the delivery of the strategy, are pivotal in driving Scotland's offering forward. I am convinced that they will succeed and that, as a consequence, so will Scotland. They will have challenges and some ups and downs, but the challenge for politicians in this Parliament and elsewhere is to help them when it is required, not give them a public mauling.

The next two years are important for Scotland. The continuation of the winning years strategy will see two of the world's top-class events coming to the country, which are huge opportunities. The Ryder cup will put Scotland in the driving seat—sorry for the pun—from a golfing perspective, and the Commonwealth games will put Glasgow on the front foot from a wider sporting perspective. Given that hundreds of millions of pounds are being invested in Glasgow by the Scottish Government in sporting infrastructure, accommodation, staffing and transport links to make the games a success, I am sure that, in their heart of hearts, those who claimed that Glasgow was being ripped off know that be to an inaccurate claim.

I warmly welcome the conference bid fund, which has had a tremendous amount of success so far. Glasgow has done well, and the thousands of additional people who have come to Scotland or who will come to Scotland in coming years are a huge boost to the Glasgow economy. The Scottish Government's collaborative work with Glasgow City Council and the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau is an example that should be emulated.

Duncan McNeil: The member will agree that the Commonwealth games are a great opportunity for places such as Inverclyde, not just in sporting links but in cultural links. Many of the grandparents or ancestors of participants in the games from Australia, New Zealand and Canada left these shores from Greenock, and more could be done to

ensure that they walk the streets that their forefathers walked.

Stuart McMillan: Absolutely. Inverclyde has a tremendous opportunity to make much more of tourism. I will come on to Inverclyde in a moment.

Business tourism comes in all shapes and sizes, whether large conferences coming to the cities or smaller events. Earlier this year, Celestica, an organisation that is based in Gourrock, held a small conference of vice-presidents from around the world, who stayed at the Inverkip hotel. That decision was based on the stunning location. It would have been too small to have qualified for any assistance through the bid fund—it involved only about eight people—but it was important to the economy that it served.

As far as the future is concerned, the Beacon arts centre, as one of the 31 locations outside the cities that can seat 500 people, represents a wonderful opportunity to bring conferences into Inverclyde. I highlighted its importance to Malcolm Roughhead some months ago, and I am pleased that he took up the point and passed it on to his colleagues in VisitScotland.

The bigger cities have plenty of bed space, but smaller locations have a shortage of it. That is the case across the west of Scotland.

The west of Scotland has wonderful opportunities. Inverclyde, in particular, has wonderful opportunities in the shape of the Beacon arts centre and the number of people who left the area many years ago for the new world. A great deal more can be done in Inverclyde. I am biased, but anyone who goes there will get a tremendous welcome and nowhere can compete with its stunning location.

16:01

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I am delighted to contribute to this important debate on business tourism, and I thank Fergus Ewing for securing time for us to raise some of the key issues to do with visitor numbers and the economic benefits that business tourists can bring to Scotland.

I begin by highlighting the excellent record of Glasgow City Council in attracting corporate and commercial visitors to our city. Glasgow regularly hosts national and international conferences and has gained a strong reputation as a city that means business. As I am sure that all members will be aware, Glasgow has secured the position of number 1 destination for business tourism in the UK outside London. That is due in no small part to the council's support for the tourism sector in Glasgow and the vision and foresight of the

Labour administration in attracting and sustaining investment.

In particular, our hospitality sector has enjoyed expansion as a result of a high level of support from the council. New hotels and guest houses have been well supported in attracting business and leisure tourists to Scotland's largest city. Those new businesses have been instrumental in delivering new jobs for Glasgow's young people and have proved to be resilient in an otherwise struggling economic reality.

Glasgow benefits hugely from the business tourism sector in Scotland, but we know that other major cities such as Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen can attribute a significant proportion of inward investment to the facilitation of conferences, international meetings, conventions and exhibitions. Part of the reason for that is the broad range of facilities that our major Scottish cities can offer business tourists, in the form of conference centres, well-equipped meeting spaces, theatres and galleries.

Equally, international visitors require a well-developed transport network that links city centres, train stations, business centres and airports efficiently and without unnecessary delays, and which does not result in them incurring unnecessary costs. That is why I believe that investment in transport infrastructure is the key factor in achieving further growth in the important business tourism sector and must be a central focus of efforts to sustain the current benefit to Scotland of more than £809 million annually. Scotland must position itself as a leading player globally and a destination that can compete with other UK and international cities that may also be well placed to deliver for the business tourist and their needs.

Dennis Robertson: Does the member acknowledge that the north-east of Scotland is a global player in the energy sector? Next year, with the subsea conference in February and the Offshore Europe conference in September, we will probably attract people from more than 90 different countries to the north-east.

Anne McTaggart: I sure do acknowledge that and congratulate Mr Robertson on it.

It is clear that, to realise our ambition, we must build transport links for our visitors that are faster, cheaper and more efficient.

We must focus on connecting travel hubs with our city centres and on building a comprehensive network and onward connections so that many of our towns and cities can benefit from high visitor numbers to Scotland. It is incredibly frustrating that the process has been so significantly inhibited by the Scottish National Party's decision to cancel the Glasgow airport rail link and it is disappointing that

there are no plans to re-establish the proposals for that scheme. Now is the time for the Scottish Government to boost the tourism sector in Scotland by looking again at the transport networks that service our visitors and for it to start planning for the future in terms of how we will deliver a first-class service for all of Scotland's business and leisure tourists.

The Scottish tourism sector employs more than 200,000 people across the country and indirectly supports many more of our businesses through increased spending and visitor numbers in our towns and cities. In a highly competitive marketplace, Scotland must now do all that it can to support tourism and sustain the businesses and families that rely on the strength of the industry. In particular, business tourism can offer unique opportunities for the Scottish economy in bringing high numbers of individuals to Scotland to enjoy our unique facilities and resources and to promote Scotland as a first-class business destination worldwide.

16:06

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): We have had ponies breakdancing and Chic Brodie claiming that he is training one—you can tell that we are all desperately trying to zizz up the debate. We have had MICE—at least that is an acronym to toy with. It stands for meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions and events—we learn something every day, whether we want to or not. Then we had Dennis "Am I from the north-east?" Robertson. Yes, I too am impressed with returns from the bank of Fergus. Crumbs, I am bored with my speech already. Members' speeches were littered with a lot of local press releases, so it is not all bad.

In anticipating the debate, I did a rough survey of hotels across my constituency—I can be as parochial as other members—against the background of the concerns of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee about the winning years project, which seeks to maximise opportunities from all that happens from now until 2014 as regards major events in Scotland.

The committee's report noted—and we have all seen this—that the winning years project appears to be

"focused more on urban areas"

and that

"rural areas might not benefit equally"

from it.

A few of us have now got into a fight about that. I will give members a prime example. The Commonwealth games are to be held in Glasgow.

Where are the rugby sevens being held? They are not being held in Melrose, home of the rugby sevens—so much for rural places getting their fair share.

John Mason: Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: Please. I am glad that the member is still awake—that is a compliment.

John Mason: Does the member agree that if we could get businesspeople to come to Glasgow or Edinburgh, for example, and 40 per cent of those businesspeople came back again, they would be likely to go to the Borders, the Highlands and elsewhere?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members not to sit with their backs to the chair. Thank you.

Christine Grahame: No, that would not happen—it is not likely.

I welcome the £2 million for the conference bid fund but we know that none of the rural places is getting it. Rural areas are not applying—frankly, they did not know about it. As regards business tourism, we are really looking at the major cities, which are in the central belt and the north-east.

I did my survey as part of my usual business surgeries. I went round several areas in the Borders to hotels that are quite useful as conference venues. The MacDonald Cardrona hotel near Peebles recently hosted the Prison Officers Association of Scotland conference—it can hold conferences. Peebles Hydro frequently has the Scottish Police Federation conferences. Use of Traquair house extends to book festivals and smaller conferences. The Tweed Horizons centre has a wide range of facilities. I use the Tontine hotel, which is in Peebles, for meetings. Some of the ladies present, and perhaps some of the gentlemen, will recognise Stobo Castle for its spa facilities, but it also holds business conferences. There is also Abbotsford house, which is being brought back to its prime. As I understand it, it was the home of the founder of tourism, Sir Walter Scott. It has a wonderful visitor centre that is just open and it is available for conferences.

However, there are problems. Transport links, particularly to the Peebles and Traquair side of the Borders, are a huge issue that many people have raised, and the lack of national exposure of the Borders by VisitScotland has been brought to my attention. VisitScotland tends to focus on the Highlands and Islands, and possibly the north-east. There is a link to the high cost of business advertising—

Mary Scanlon: I have to say something about the comparison of the Highlands with the Borders. At least the Borders are on the south of Scotland

walking map for VisitScotland; the Highlands and Islands do not even exist.

Christine Grahame: I did not think that the Highlands and Islands would be on the south of Scotland walking map, but maybe my geography is wrong.

Aside from his training of horses, Chic Brodie is right about connectivity. Broadband speed and mobile reception are big issues for people who are holding a business conference.

I have not finished my negatives. I have already mentioned the other negative, which is that many people are unaware of the conference bid fund. We need to do more than have this debate about that fund; information about it has to be taken out proactively to small to medium-sized businesses.

On the plus side, many who have met the minister and heard him speak thought that he was a decent chap, and they liked the cut of his jib—that is it.

Dennis Robertson: I am from the north-east of Scotland. [*Laughter.*]

If Christine Grahame looks at the positives, she will see that places such as Peebles Hydro have the facilities to hold conferences. I have been to Crieff Hydro, Peebles Hydro and Dunblane Hydro for various conferences, such as ophthalmic and optometry conferences. She should promote those venues to the royal associations and colleges.

Christine Grahame: I am doing that. Members are looking at a Borders business tourism ambassador in the making.

The jury was out on VisitScotland, which talks a good talk, but people were not convinced that it walks the walk.

There are issues to do with the dispersal of business tourism to areas such as the Scottish Borders. I know that the rail link will help the central Borders, but it will not do very much for the west. Therefore, I ask the minister to liaise—I am sure that he does so regularly—with the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities, as infrastructure is more than incidental to dispersing business tourism.

16:12

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): Tourism is without a doubt an enormous plus for Scotland. Scotland's natural beauty, history, heritage and leisure facilities and our internationally renowned reputation as a friendly host all play their part. We should look at business tourism in that context, and we should try wherever we possibly can to link those assets with the needs of business. We should continue to

encourage visitors to plan extra time in order to experience Scotland outside the conference hall.

As Mike MacKenzie mentioned, tourism has continued to grow, despite the economic climate—it grew by 9 per cent last year. Although tourism faces many challenges, business tourism contributes £878 million to the economy, as has been said. I certainly believe that improving the business tourism take as a proportion of the total tourism take to 25 per cent is very achievable.

Tourism supports approximately 270,000 jobs, and a high proportion of jobs in rural areas are based on it. My North East Fife constituency is one such rural area. I would like to say a little bit about that area as opposed to north-east Scotland, which Dennis Robertson talked about.

North East Fife has an outstanding amount to offer visitors, from the beautiful coastal villages of the east neuk to the numerous golf courses and St Andrews, which some folk say is the jewel in the crown. North East Fife is certainly a destination for leisure visitors, but a great deal is also being done to promote the area—St Andrews in particular—as a business tourism destination. St Andrews, of course, features in the ambassador programme, which is fundamentally designed to spread the word. The University of St Andrews is a key partner in the central ambassador programme, which covers the key areas of aquaculture, sport, medicine and science.

On the conference bid fund, it is not only Glasgow that has been successful, of course: St Andrews has been successful in attracting a conference in October 2013. The interactive tabletops and surfaces conference, which operates in the field of new and emerging tabletop and interactive surface technologies, is co-hosting an event with the user interface software and technology—UIST—forum. It is hoped that that event will attract 435 delegates and that just under £1 million will be spent between 6 October and 9 October next year. If St Andrews can do it, I hope that other places can, too. We should do our best to promote that fund.

The Fife tourism partnership is another organisation that acts as a forum for events and the sharing of resources, principally through a directory, which can be helpful for business in promoting facilities. In addition, the St Andrews Partnership held two-day workshops on 23 and 30 October this year, promoting business tourism in the area. We should also bear in mind VisitScotland's central Scotland business tourism unit, which exists to provide impartial advice on venues and local services to those who are planning a conference or another event.

There is no shortage of premium meeting and conference facilities in and around St Andrews. It

is, after all, the home of golf and the hotels around the town—the Old Course hotel and the Fairmont, to name but two—have substantial conference facilities and a wide range of products to suit a business clientele. However, it is fair to say that because a great number of Fife's business tourism facilities are located in St Andrews, opportunities elsewhere in the kingdom of Fife are relatively limited.

The concentration of business tourism facilities in major centres of population is a pattern that is repeated in all parts of Scotland. For the organisers of an exhibition, it is clearly more practical in a logistical sense to gravitate towards centres of population where there are more convenient transport links and services, and the problem is not unique to Scotland. That is why it is important that all the stakeholders involved in the tourism sector take the necessary steps to ensure that the benefits of business tourism are shared as widely as possible.

As I said, tourism supports a relatively high proportion of the total number of jobs in rural areas. When efforts are made to draw tourists to a particular town or city, be it St Andrews or Dundee, there needs to be an effective strategy in place to draw conference visitors out of those places into the wider area and to get them to invest their time and enjoyment in the region as a whole. VisitScotland has a role to play in that strategy. It operates a frequent outreach service whereby knowledgeable staff from visitor information centres, where they normally interact with leisure tourists, attend conferences and events around the country to link business tourists with the wider leisure facilities that are available—facilities that they might not otherwise have considered. It is also in the interests of the tourism industry as a whole if we can showcase the diversity of Scotland and encourage visitors to come back again and again, with conference delegates bringing their families along for a second visit, as Fergus Ewing suggested.

We already know that Scotland is doing well on business tourism. As a whole, we are an attractive place in which to do business and hold conferences. We have a proven track record of success, testament to which is the fact that nearly a third of international association conferences held in the UK are hosted in Scotland. In terms of strengthening the link between business visitors and leisure, we have a perfect opportunity next year to attract visitors to more rural areas as the year of natural Scotland in 2013 unfolds. As members have suggested, we can be optimistic and build on our success to date.

I would be grateful if, in his closing remarks, the minister would address the comments that were made in the recent Economy, Energy and Tourism

Committee report in relation to the possible disadvantages for rural areas.

16:18

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on business tourism. Tourism in general has been targeted as a growth industry in Scotland, particularly in the run-up to the 2014 Commonwealth games, the Ryder cup and beyond. Within that sector, business tourism has a massive part to play and is already contributing more than £800 million a year to the Scottish economy.

Figures also show that business tourism visitors contribute 50 to 100 per cent more to the local economy in spending than leisure tourists, as has been said, and they are likely to visit again on holiday if they have a positive experience. That highlights how important it is that the Government and local authorities work to attract business tourism here, to bring money into the economy immediately and to increase the possibility of return visits by making people welcome and their stay as comfortable as possible.

Glasgow has been tremendously successful in attracting business tourism and has secured its position as the UK's largest destination for business tourism outside London. That did not happen by chance; it happened because the administration at Glasgow City Council recognised business tourism's importance to the city's economy. Council leader Gordon Matheson chairs the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau, which underlines the significance of the bureau's activities. When we consider the figures, it is easy to see why the council's administration places such emphasis on business tourism. Conference delegates account for one in five hotel beds in Glasgow.

John Mason: I take the member's point about the good things that Glasgow has done, but does he accept that a success of the SECC is that despite its being publicly owned it is kept at a distance from Glasgow City Council and there has not been political interference?

Mark Griffin: The SECC is run by members of the council, so there is involvement by the council. Glasgow City Marketing Bureau markets all Glasgow's venues, so naturally there is involvement, particularly given that such a high-profile council leader is at the forefront of activity.

Glasgow has been successful in bidding for funding from the conference bid fund that the Government unveiled this year. The £2 million fund was set up with the aim of making Scotland more competitive in the international conference market and is open for bids to attract conferences

that relate to one of the Government's 12 target sectors.

Glasgow has been able to secure seven major domestic and international conferences, which will bring into the city almost 17,000 visitors from around the world, account for about 80,000 hotel room nights and contribute a massive £27 million to the city's economy. The conferences were won in an extremely competitive international market. Glasgow had to beat off competition from venues across the world, including Paris, San Francisco and Tokyo—the city is in illustrious company.

The initial investment of £2 million in the conference bid fund has proven to be valuable. The minister illustrated with his coin trick just how valuable business tourism is. I am sure that other authorities will benefit from the funding and expertise that are on offer. As members have said, some authorities have already benefited. Aberdeen City Council is making great strides in attracting business tourism. As the Labour amendment says, the council has committed to paying off

“the accumulated £26.2 million debt of the Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre”,

which shows the council's commitment to business tourism and to growing international conference business in Aberdeen.

It is important that the Government and local authorities work to increase business tourism, which brings an immediate boost to the local economy. It is perhaps more important that the experience of visiting delegates is positive, so that global organisations, trade groups and businesses feel confident about returning to Scotland to hold conferences or do business and delegates choose to come back here on holiday.

That means that when, at a conference or convention, we have a captive audience of people who would not ordinarily visit Scotland, we must realise all possible promotional opportunities. That includes the friendly welcome at the hotel or venue, promotional material at the conference, good Scottish cuisine and easy access to recreational activities outside the conference. I hope that all conference delegates in Glasgow this month are made aware of the excellent shopping facilities in the city centre, as Christmas approaches.

The Government also needs to ensure that journeys are convenient and comfortable and that transport connections are as seamless as possible. Our airports need to be directly connected to our cities. Since the cancellation of the Glasgow airport rail link, the Government has not come up with an effective alternative solution for linking the airport with the city centre.

I do not want to end on a negative note, so I finish by praising the Government for its commitment to the business tourism sector and the £2 million bid fund. However, there is more to do to improve transport and ensure that delegates come back to Scotland again and again.

16:24

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

We have heard a lot of good news at the national level—for example, 23 per cent of all international association conferences in the UK are hosted in Scotland. We have some great venues, scenery, food and drink, history and golf—all the things that attract people. However, members will perhaps not be surprised if I concentrate on Glasgow.

Glasgow attracts 2.3 million visitors per year, who contribute £595 million to the local economy. The age profile of people who come to Glasgow is younger than the national average—45 per cent of them are under 35, in comparison with a national average of 32 per cent. Some 30,000 people are employed in tourism-related activities in Glasgow. We have more than 6,500 hotel rooms within 5 miles of the SECC, 9,000 rooms within 10 miles of it and 18,000 rooms in metropolitan Glasgow, if guest houses, bed and breakfasts and university accommodation are included.

The SECC has been mentioned. I should perhaps declare that I was a non-executive director of it for about a year, when I was a councillor from 2007 to 2008. It is majority owned by Glasgow City Council and has given the city a huge boost through conferences and many other events. It is a success in the public sector that is owned by the public sector, but it is without interference, and the majority of the directors are not councillors. If we are mentioning individuals, a lot of the SECC's success and growth took place under Charlie Gordon and Steven Purcell, as well as taking place under the present leadership. In 2012, the SECC was again voted the best UK conference centre.

People who have visited the SECC site recently will have seen the Scottish Hydro arena being built. The Hydro, which will have a capacity of 12,000 and is due to open in September 2013, will be suitable for music and sport events and for conferences. It is needed because the SECC does not have halls that are big enough for some events and does not have permanent seating.

The Hydro could host 140 events each year, which could inject £131 million into Glasgow's economy. It is expected to be one of the top five busiest indoor arenas in the world, along with Madison Square Garden and the O2 in London. I understand from the SECC that one of its aims after the new venue is open will be to establish

more of a trade exhibition portfolio, which could initiate growth in the local economy, through international buyers coming to Glasgow.

Glasgow City Marketing Bureau has been mentioned. It brings together venues, hotels, support services and creative industries to present a really joined-up approach to conference organisers from around the world. Some of the figures are impressive. Since the bureau was set up in 2005, it has brought £958 million to the city's economy and 3 million conference delegate hotel room nights, which represents one in five of the hotel beds that are sold in Glasgow. In 2012, the organisation was voted the UK's best convention bureau for the sixth year in a row. If we look forward to 2017, 278 conventions are confirmed, with a value of £120 million. That equates to 410,000 delegate hotel room nights.

As has been said, Glasgow has benefited from VisitScotland's £2 million national conference bid fund. The minister said that £527,000 had been put in and that we got £56 million out, which is about £106 for every £1 that was invested, if I did my figures correctly. I think that that return is even better than was suggested.

Fergus Ewing: John Mason is a mathematician, so I should have realised that he would pick up what others failed to spot. The 53:1 return takes account of match funding from other partners, including Glasgow City Council.

John Mason: I thank the minister for that clarification.

I will give another clarification. Although a lot of conferences and conventions come to the cities, they have a huge spin-off. People visit other parts of Scotland on an extended break, and we can encourage them to do that in the future. We need to continue to work on that.

Mark Griffin mentioned the seven initial conventions that were won for Glasgow through the national bid fund—I believe that that figure is now up to 15 and that 30,000 delegates are due to come. The conventions include the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health conference in 2013 and the world biomaterials congress in 2020.

The Diabetes UK conference is an example of a very successful conference that took place in Glasgow. The conference, which took place in March, was attended by some 2,800 scientists and healthcare professionals. Only four places in Britain were big enough to hold it—the others were London, Manchester and Liverpool. One of the strengths of that conference was the relationship between the SECC, Glasgow City Marketing Bureau, Kelvingrove art gallery—which held a dinner that Glasgow Life was involved in—and the lord provost from the council. The national health service linked into the conference, with general

practitioners being encouraged to attend. Publicity and roadshows around the city raised the profile of diabetes and encouraged referrals to GPs.

We need to play to our strengths. Clearly, our weather is not always attractive to us but it can be attractive to other people. The fact that we speak English can also be a real positive for us. One reason why I like to go to Ireland is that I leave the UK but can still speak English.

Scotland loses out by being in the union, and once we are independent our higher international profile will help us attract many more conferences.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): We now move to winding-up speeches. A number of members who took part in the debate are not here for the winding-up speeches: Mike MacKenzie, Duncan McNeil, Tavish Scott and Christine Grahame. I find that behaviour unacceptable and I am confident that the whips will do something about it—and do something about it quickly.

16:31

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This welcome debate has been largely consensual. All members have recognised the value of business tourism, which, as the Government motion says, contributes £2.9 billion to the Scottish economy. That is vital, particularly in these difficult times. Indeed, although business tourism is by no means recession proof, aspects of it—in particular, conference organisers that deal with public sector organisations and various associations—have perhaps ridden out the recession better than some other areas of commercial activity.

As we heard in the debate, the main market for Scottish business tourism is the rest of the UK. There is a key issue that we need to address, which I raised in the briefing that we had at lunch time. We need to encourage those who are perhaps coming to take part in a conference to extend their stay to participate in other activities or visit other parts of the country. Of course, we can do that only if we get to them before they make their bookings and commit to their flights. There is a question of co-ordination there, which I know that the minister and his officials are working on.

I welcome the conference bid fund that the minister referred to and the success that it is having in attracting visitors from elsewhere. On the subject of finance, I was interested that a number of SNP members called for a reduction in VAT for the sector. Of course, that call is made by many in the tourism and hospitality industry, which is not surprising. It is a certainty in life that if you ask someone in business whether they would rather pay lower taxes, the answer is invariably yes. Although I am not surprised that people make that

call, it is curious that the SNP would rather focus its attention on a tax that is controlled elsewhere, than a business tax that is controlled by this Government—business rates.

Dennis Robertson: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: I will make this point before giving way to Mr Robertson.

I am sure that if people in the tourism sector were asked whether they would welcome a cut in business rates, they would endorse it enthusiastically. I am surprised that SNP members did not call for that, but I give Mr Robertson the opportunity to do so.

Dennis Robertson: It is not the SNP as such that is calling for a VAT reduction, but the British Hospitality Association, which has been looking for a VAT reduction for years. It says that for every pound that came off VAT, it would get several back—although I cannot remember the figures. The industry says that there would be greater investment if VAT was reduced.

Murdo Fraser: I am sure that that would apply equally to business rates, but of course SNP members would rather concentrate their fire on a Government and a Parliament on which they have little influence, as opposed to one over which they have, I suspect, a great deal of influence.

That is my only discordant note in this debate.

Christine Grahame: Oh, no.

Murdo Fraser: So as not to disappoint Christine Grahame, I will make some references to my local area, and in particular Perth and Kinross, where we have some great assets. Gleneagles hotel is a conference venue where the G7 was held and, with Stephen Leckie in the gallery, I cannot fail to mention Crieff Hydro. I would be surprised if there was a single member in the chamber who had not at some point been to a conference at that wonderful establishment. Elsewhere, we have Pitlochry Festival Theatre, which is an excellent conference venue that is well served by local hotels.

In the city of Perth—Scotland's newest city—we have the marvellous facility that is the concert hall, which opened in 2005. In the 2010-11 year, 19,000 conference delegates attended events at the concert hall over 54 days. Conferences have been held there by the Conservatives, the SNP, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Educational Institute of Scotland and many others. In 2008, which is the last year for which we have figures, the economic benefit was worth £1.3 million annually, and I am sure that it is much greater today. The feedback from those who have attended conferences there is extremely positive.

There are, however, challenges for the city. First, although we have some very good-quality hotels in Perth, there is a need for a high-quality—perhaps four star—large hotel close to the city centre to serve the conference market. I know that Perth and Kinross officials are working on trying to attract such an operator.

Secondly, good conference destinations need to be underpinned by an academic and research community. In Perth, we have Perth College, which is part of the University of the Highlands and Islands that contains the excellent centre for mountain studies, which helped to attract the global change and the world's mountains conference in 2010. It would be good for that centre to be expanded if possible, so that we can attract yet more conferences.

There is a challenge around connectivity. For example, we need better transport links. I am always banging on about the rail link between Perth and Edinburgh and how it can be improved. Stephen Leckie would not forgive me if I did not mention broadband, because people who attend conferences at the Crieff Hydro expect to have high-quality access to fast broadband, and the connection is not good enough at present. That should also mean access to 3G and 4G, as it is being rolled out, so that we do not leave rural areas behind.

We need high-quality skills in hospitality, which is an issue that members of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee have touched on a great many times in the past year. Perhaps business tourism throughout the year can help to tackle the seasonality issue, which is key to driving up standards in hospitality and to upskilling the workforce.

The debate has been very positive, and I commend the work that the Government is doing. Equally, I commend the work that the private sector is doing in attracting business tourism. I am happy to support the Government's motion and the Labour amendment.

16:37

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

When I saw that this debate was coming up, I thought that we might be in for quite a boring afternoon as, while it is on a good cause, there might not be an awful lot to say. I am delighted that I was not right in that regard. Christine Grahame is right to say that a lot of members have used the debate to highlight what is best in their own constituencies, but in doing so they have highlighted what is best in Scotland. That augurs well for us all in a positive debate that is about telling the world what we are good at.

The debate has been excellent for highlighting the importance of business tourism to the Scottish economy; I will not rehash the various statistics that we have heard. One thing that business tourism does is to create all-year-round tourism, which has always been an issue. The seasonality of the tourism industry has meant that it has been low-skilled and low-paid, and there has been no career path. Many members have spoken about the career path and the skills that are required. Having a year-round career will help that to happen, which can only benefit us and the wider tourism industry.

Many members talked about the level of spend by the tourist visitor, which it is right to highlight. Members such as Mark Griffin mentioned the impact of retail, and highlighted the good retail experience in Glasgow, which has a knock-on benefit for restaurants and hotels. Margaret McCulloch talked about the benefit for our local businesses, even though they may not be directly involved in the conferences, in the form of networking opportunities and the ability to learn from the visitors. Business tourism is an opportunity for us all to showcase Scotland in the hope that people will come back with their families for other trips.

Many members talked about the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's report on the winning years and the challenges of getting more people out into our more rural areas. In the report, the committee noted that although urban areas are doing well, rural areas are not doing so well. Some members mentioned the Glasgow Commonwealth games and said that there is a concentration on Glasgow and not areas further out. When the committee took evidence on that subject, it was reassured to hear that the organising committee is looking at ways in which to encourage people to extend their stay and go out to other areas. It is important to put that on the record, and I hope that those efforts will be successful. However, we will need things such as through ticketing, ticketing to the rest of Scotland and better transport and connectivity to make that happen.

Colin Beattie's observations about being a business tourist were eye opening. He talked about the importance of convenient facilities and even things such as tartan gift shops near conference venues. However, we probably need to look at extending business tourism visits rather than just ensuring that visitors go to places close by. Earlier today, we discussed the professional conference management organisations' roles in that and the need for people to go out and speak to them beforehand so that they know what is on offer in other parts of Scotland and can encourage people to book beyond the event that they are attending. That will enable business tourists to go out into other parts of Scotland. Duncan McNeil

made a good bid for Inverclyde in that respect. People who go to Glasgow for business tourism events could be sailing down in Inverclyde soon afterwards if we had the proper transport links.

That brings me to transport, which was one of the big issues in the debate. It is clear that we need better transport links. Many members talked about air passenger duty and the double whammy for passengers who use a hub and connecting flights. I am sure that Tavish Scott, who talked about the air discount scheme, would agree with me that people from the islands often face a triple whammy from air passenger duty because, as well as travelling from the island to a centre, they have to catch a connecting flight to the hub, and they then have to pay again, so in all they have to pay the duty three times. We need to consider how we can deal with that problem. I agree with Tavish Scott that we need to reinstate the air discount scheme for businesses. Doing so would make a big difference by creating a level playing field for businesses in our islands, and it would help to grow their economies.

Many members talked about rail links between our airports and the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh and further afield. It is important that the minister takes that back and considers the issue. We need to improve those transport links so that we can get people from the airports to other transport hubs and, indeed, out to the rest of Scotland. I think that it was Roderick Campbell who talked about the logistics of transport and the way in which it pulls people into urban areas rather than pushing them out into our more rural areas.

Members talked about the air route development scheme, which was run so well by Glasgow, and said that we could try to replicate it in other places. Perhaps we need to consider direct flights for conferences. When people are setting up conferences in our cities, we perhaps need to provide better transport links and, if we work with our airports, we could do that.

At the beginning of the debate, Fergus Ewing said unashamedly that he hoped that the debate would be a chance to highlight the conference bid fund, which is perhaps not well recognised throughout Scotland. It is clear that the fund is not just for the larger urban areas, but I suppose that it is only natural that cities that are involved in business tourism are aware of the fund and are making the most of it. All of us who took the opportunity to talk about the facilities in our areas and their ability to attract business tourism need to take back to those areas information about the bid fund and the opportunity to pull in help for business tourism.

Mary Scanlon and Murdo Fraser touched on an area that is close to my heart, namely broadband and mobile connectivity. If we are to attract

business tourism, we need proper broadband and mobile facilities. If we do not have that, people will not come because they will not be able to continue with their work.

I am aware of the time, but I wanted to touch on a lot of other matters, particularly the issue of cities as highlighted in our amendment. Many Glasgow MSPs took the opportunity to highlight what Glasgow has done and the council's contribution; other members have mentioned Aberdeen, Perth and Dundee. I will take this opportunity to mention Inverness—after all, Eden Court is a favourite for party conferences—and Oban, both of which are in my region.

At the beginning of the debate, Ken Macintosh rightly highlighted the challenges to our economy. However, this particular sector is growing and we need to make the most of it. We are known for heather, bagpipes and the film "Brave", and I am not sure that that is such a bad thing. We need to build on such stereotypes and make it clear that there is more to Scotland than that and that we are a good destination for all forms of business tourism. As we are all ambassadors, we must all ensure that we sell Scotland for that purpose.

16:46

Fergus Ewing: I have thoroughly enjoyed this excellent and useful debate, which will help to promote a better understanding around the country of business tourism and the bid fund, and I am extremely grateful to every member who has taken part. I will try to do justice to members and address specific points but, as is my wont, I undertake to write to those who have made specific calls for information. If I fail to do so, they should chivvy me, raise a few points of order or whatever to ensure that I do not neglect their utterances and demands.

Ken Macintosh rightly suggested that we need to instil in young people the idea that they can have an excellent career in tourism. Indeed, Margaret McCulloch pointed out that it should, as in France, be regarded as a profession. I endorse both sentiments and cite the excellent example of the good work of the East Lothian Hospitality and Tourism Academy, which held a reception in the Parliament and whose achievements I have since had the chance to learn more about at an event attended by many college representatives. We certainly appreciate that work, which is helping to achieve the aims that have been described.

Mary Scanlon quite rightly highlighted the success that has been achieved in Inverness. A few weeks ago, I attended a flagship buyer event called Scotland means business, at which buyers have a speed-dating session with many of our visitor attractions. That event will be held in

Inverness next year, and I hope that Mary Scanlon and I can have a little private date then. That said, I should not use mere flattery to neglect or ignore the member's ever-persistent pursuit of our website's apparent defects in identifying walks in the Highlands and Islands. I am determined to get to the very bottom of this—believe me, I am going to sort this one out, particularly as I am off to Orkney tomorrow.

I was very pleased to hear Margaret McCulloch's praise for VisitLanarkshire. I met Stephen Balfour at the recent Scotland means business event and the member is right to say that VisitLanarkshire itself represents a fine example of partnership. Duncan McNeil highlighted the use of the quayside in Greenock and Inverclyde, and the extraordinary success that his constituents, partners, local authorities and others have achieved with the cruise industry and the 60,000 people who pass through there every year. I recently sent a letter of support to Richard Alexander, chair of CruiseScotland, in which I asked what we could do to help it secure further business in the north American market. This is truly a Scottish success story. All around Scotland from Orkney to Greenock to Leith, our ports and harbours are being used for the cruise industry in ways that we would never have expected, even a decade ago, and it is great that they are also being used for other purposes such as renewables.

Tavish Scott raised the issue of the air discount scheme, on which he and Liam McArthur have campaigned valiantly. I hope that members will bear with me, because I am not absolutely sure of the details of this. Nevertheless, because Mr Scott has raised the matter in a very straightforward and appropriate way, I undertake to look into the matter.

My understanding from a note that I have been given is that it was not the intention for the scheme to extend to business-related travel—it was a scheme for individuals—but if I am wrong I will put that right. In any event, I will look into the issue further and write to Mr Scott about it.

As always, Christine Grahame made an interesting speech. No one can accuse Christine Grahame of being anyone's patsy; she is most certainly a woman of independent mind. As she said, I have visited her part of Scotland—the Borders—on a few occasions recently, and I recognise that the people there face a number of difficulties. We are on the case, and VisitScotland is aware of the situation.

I recently had the pleasure of visiting Traquair house. At 9.30 in the morning, I had the pleasure of sampling the newly brewed Jacobite ale—thereby no doubt transgressing some Scottish Government health advice—and I must say that it was very good. I know that Traquair house also

holds the Shakespeare festival. We hear a lot from Christine Grahame about the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune aimed towards her constituency and constituents, so it is absolutely right that she raises the points that she does.

Murdo Fraser made a number of good points about the importance of the conference market and business tourism to places furth of the central belt and to the fine city of Perth in particular. He mentioned the success of the city's halls and, as he pointed out, we recently had a conference in Perth concert hall that was pleasant, enjoyable and successful from everyone's perspective.

I also recall that Murdo Fraser mentioned the Pitlochry Festival Theatre. I had the pleasure of attending an event there on Sunday, when I had the opportunity of meeting people from Scotland's finest bed and breakfasts and listening to their concerns, which we take very seriously. There is a sense in Scotland that the difficulties in the tourism sector are faced perhaps more in rural and island areas than in the cities. We are very much aware of that issue, and we are keen to work with all members to address it.

There were perhaps three recurring issues that pervaded the debate, and I will touch on them before concluding. First, there was the issue of the divide between cities and rural areas in relation to business tourism. I think that we have all agreed that there is more potential for growing business tourism all over Scotland, both urban and rural.

Although I cannot reveal the details now as the bids are subject to commercial confidentiality, I can advise members that there are a number of bids to the bid fund from rural areas, and I would be surprised if none of them was successful. I believe that we can all do much more to promote to our local authorities the success of the fund. I am certainly keen to do that. When I meet councillors from around Scotland, I often have no idea which party they are from, if any, and frankly I am not especially interested, because what we want to do is to make things happen, to promote the economy and to see every part of Scotland benefiting from business tourism.

Christine Grahame: The bid fund is worth £2 million over three years. How will that be allocated? Would it all go in one year if enough people applied, or will you stagger the fund over the three years?

Fergus Ewing: The fund is available for three years. It will be committed to various conferences that are won between now and the end of the decade—and, in one case, beyond. The money will not have to be paid until much nearer or at the time of the conference in question.

We shall have to see how the fund performs. Currently, about £500,000 or £600,000 has been

committed after a relatively short period, and we will keep the situation closely under review. Thus far, the success of the fund is at a notional return to the public sector of 53:1, as I pointed out gently—or perhaps not gently—to members earlier. As many members, not just from the Scottish National Party, have been kind enough to point out during the debate, that is a terrific success for Scotland. I am grateful to all the members who recognise that that is the case. It is something that we should build on, as there can be far greater things yet to come. We are looking closely at how we can build on the success.

The other themes raised included transport links. I do not think that I have time to go into all of them, but suffice it to say that almost all the points raised are of a serious nature and we are either pursuing them now or will pursue them in due course.

The M74 extension has transformed connectivity in Glasgow. The Aberdeen western peripheral route will now go ahead and thereby solve a long-standing and very serious problem in Aberdeen.

The third theme related to the costs imposed by VAT, APD and fuel duty. Many members highlighted that these are extremely challenging times for both Governments and businesses, and they were right to highlight those issues.

Presiding Officer, do I have much time left?

The Presiding Officer: You have about one minute.

Fergus Ewing: Bringing my remarks to a conclusion, I thank all members who took part for a very consensual debate. However, as Murdo Fraser pointed out, the real thanks and praise should go to all those who run conference facilities, who organise conferences, who bring business tourists to this country and who participate in the success of this venture. They are now working in partnership together more successfully, I think, than at any time in Scotland's history—I have to say that Glasgow is ahead of the rest of the country in that regard—and that close partnership working is delivering enormous business tourism success for Scotland.

Perhaps even more important than the monetary return is that those efforts are creating a hugely positive image of Scotland for all those visitors who come here—a worldwide image. Given that 40 per cent of those who come here will come back, the more conferences that we can win at home and from abroad, and the more we see business tourism take off—not only in our cities, but in rural Scotland and in our islands—the more success we will see in not only our tourism business, but our industry, our inward investment and our country as a whole.

I am extremely indebted to the leadership shown by Mike Cantlay and Malcolm Roughead at VisitScotland and to all their staff. On behalf of the Scottish Government—and, I believe, the Scottish Parliament—I thank them for all their efforts. The best, I think, is yet to come.

Point of Order

16:57

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I wonder whether I may seek your advice.

On 25 October, in response to a question that I asked at First Minister's question time, the First Minister said in part of his reply:

"There are now, I think, 18,000 people employed directly in renewable energy across Scotland."—[*Official Report*, 25 October 2012; c 12617.]

A Scottish Government briefing, which is based on the evidence produced by the renewables sector, says very clearly that there are in fact 11,000 people directly employed in the sector, which is a difference of 7,000.

When the error was pointed out to the First Minister's office yesterday, a Scottish Government spokesman said:

"The first minister has corrected the parliament's official report to make it clear there now are 11,000 jobs supported by Scotland's renewable energy sector."

Presiding Officer, may I ask your advice as to whether the official record can be amended in this way without the First Minister acknowledging to Parliament that an error has been made and without informing the member concerned?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I thank the member for her advance notice of the point of order. I was first made aware of the issue earlier this afternoon and I have since made inquiries.

I understand that the original request from the First Minister's office for a correction to the *Official Report* was made on the morning of 15 November. I can confirm that the correction to the *Official Report* was made this afternoon.

The process for agreeing corrections to the *Official Report* was agreed in a report by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in 2010. That report also sets out the criteria used by the official report and the processes to be followed. The member will be well aware that the guidance includes steps that a member should take to publicise the correction when it has been made. I confirm that the correction to the *Official Report* was made this afternoon. All this information is set out on the official report's web page on the Parliament's website. [*Interruption.*]

Business Motions

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-04896, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business for tomorrow. [*Interruption.*] Order!

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): You're out of order.

The Presiding Officer: Mr McMahon, I ask you to withdraw that remark now.

Michael McMahon: I apologise.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you.

I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-04896.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick): Before I move the motion, I point out that the change is to allow for a debate on further education, as requested by the Liberal Democrats.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 22 November 2012—

delete

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: The Modernisation of Scotland's Career Services

and insert

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: Further Education

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-04895, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 27 November 2012

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Local Government Finance Settlement 2013-14

followed by Scottish Government Debate: St Andrew's Day, A Celebration of Scotland

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Statute Law (Repeals) Bill – UK Legislation

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
 Wednesday 28 November 2012
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Education and Lifelong Learning
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 29 November 2012

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.30 pm Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: Remploy
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 4 December 2012

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 5 December 2012

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 6 December 2012

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Scottish Government Business
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-04898, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for stage 2 of the Freedom of Information (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill. [*Interruption.*] There is far too much noise.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Freedom of Information (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 2 be completed by 14 December 2012.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motions S4M-04903, S4M-04904 and S4M-04905, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Rent (Scotland) Act 1984 (Premiums) Regulations 2012 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Homelessness (Abolition of Priority Need Test) (Scotland) Order 2012 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Housing Support Services (Homelessness) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-04886.2, in the name of Ken Macintosh, which seeks to amend motion S4M-04886, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on business tourism, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-04886, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on business tourism, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that the Scottish tourism industry delivers over £2.9 billion annually to the Scottish gross value added; welcomes the contribution made to this achievement by the business tourism sector; acknowledges the efforts made by the VisitScotland's Ambassador Programme to boost Scotland's profile across the world; notes that, in addition to the direct economic impact from conferences and events, they also enhance Scotland's credentials as a place to invest, study, live, work and visit again; further notes the successes to date in winning additional events with the Conference Bid Fund; encourages stakeholders of all sizes to make greater use of the match-funding available from the Conference Bid Fund to win even further business for Scotland; notes the value of business tourism in terms of promoting growth and dealing with issues of seasonality; recognises the key role of Scotland's cities in developing business tourism, for example in Glasgow, where the city council has worked hard to achieve the position of largest destination for business tourism in the UK outside London, and in Aberdeen, where the city council has, in 2012, paid off the accumulated £26.2 million debt of the Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre in order to continue to grow international conference business in the city; notes the importance of good transport links in helping to sustain and build on this success, and calls on the Scottish Government and local authorities to continue to work together positively to replicate this success across Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motions S4M-04903, S4M-04904 and S4M-04905, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Rent (Scotland) Act 1984 (Premiums) Regulations 2012 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Homelessness (Abolition of Priority Need Test) (Scotland) Order 2012 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Housing Support Services (Homelessness) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: Before we move on to members' business, I say that I would appreciate it if Mr McMahon would come and see me in my office immediately after decision time.

National Museum of Costume

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-4468, in the name of Claudia Beamish, on Scotland's national museum of costume.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament expresses concern at the proposed closure of the National Museum of Costume in Dumfries and Galloway; notes that the museum's operator, National Museums Scotland (NMS), is conducting an internal consultation on the proposal; understands that NMS has commented saying that it can no longer afford to operate the site due to the twin pressures of reduced public funding and reduced income associated with the recession; believes that the closure of this five-star rated tourist attraction, which provides nine jobs and attracts 15,000 visitors a year, would be detrimental to the tourism industry in Dumfries and Galloway, and considers that, to maximise the opportunities for people to engage with their culture, it is important that attractions showcasing Scotland's cultural heritage are located in communities across the country.

17:04

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to lead the debate and I wish, in so doing, to record my thanks to the save our Shambellie campaign and to the members who have signed my motion, and to acknowledge the representatives who have got behind the campaign at local, Scotland and United Kingdom levels.

The issue strikes at the heart of our aspiration to celebrate Scotland's rich cultural history and to ensure that it can reach and connect with as many people as possible. This evening, I want to talk about why I believe the museum's closure runs counter to that aspiration; about the interdependence of the tourism industry in Dumfries and Galloway; and about the need to have a full and open consultation to try and find a positive solution.

The proposals to close the national museum of costume arose somewhat out of the blue in early October. National Museums Scotland has told us that its decision has been influenced

"by the twin financial pressures of reduced public funding and reduced income"

from other sources. Members are all too aware of the financial situation that the country finds itself in, as are our constituents. We all know that difficult decisions have to be made, but the Scottish Parliament has—especially when those decisions are made by organisations that rely on public money for their existence—a duty to analyse them. I do not believe that the answer to balancing the books of NMS lies in the budgetary equivalent of sacrificing a limb.

Among the aims of National Museums Scotland is to ensure that its collections reach and connect with as many people as possible, as I said. Quite rightly, part of that process involves partnership working with local museums and groups across the country. Although I welcome and encourage that valuable aspect of NMS's work, it is not the whole story. Alongside the cultural value of the collection it houses, I believe that Shambellie house has a physical value as a permanent anchor for NMS's work outside the central belt. Such anchors against centralisation should be encouraged, not withdrawn.

We are told that the cost per visitor stands at £23.06. That figure counts the 9,500 visitors who visit the museum itself, but ignores the further 6,250 estimated annual visitors to the shop and cafe. With those people included, the public subsidy comes to £13.93 per visitor.

As the save our Shambellie campaign has pointed out, recent investment in the relaunch of the museum of flight in East Lothian and the museum of rural life in East Kilbride has seen visitor numbers rally. A similar approach at Shambellie could surely boost visitor numbers and income, thereby demonstrating that the site is viable.

The campaign brings together strong voices in the region's tourism sector: the Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce, Destination Dumfries and Galloway and the Association of Dumfries and Galloway Accommodation Providers. The sector brings in around £270 million a year to the local economy, supporting almost 6,000 jobs directly and a further 1,300 indirectly.

All three organisations in the SOS campaign emphasise that, although the 15,000 visitors that Shambellie attracts might represent a small number relative to the numbers of people who visit other NMS properties, they are hugely important to the region's tourism sector. Those businesses and jobs do not exist in isolation; there is a strong interdependence between the visitor attractions, the markets, the cafes, the bars and the accommodation.

James Wilson, a constituent who operates self-catering accommodation in Rockcliffe on the Solway coast, wrote to me to highlight his efforts to promote Dumfries and Galloway. He said:

"It is absolutely vital for small businesses like ours that Dumfries and Galloway has a diverse and quality offer for culture and the arts. We have been long term supporters of the Museum at Shambellie House, regularly bringing friends and family to visit, and recommending the facility to our visitors."

Gordon Mann, chief executive of the Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce and chair of

Destination Dumfries and Galloway, who is in the gallery tonight, has stated:

"Closure now following one of the toughest tourism seasons the region has had would be a body blow to the industry sending out all the wrong signals."

Despite the impact that closure could have on the wider tourism industry in the region, the voice of the businesses that stand to be affected has not had a chance to be heard. That lack of public consultation is a key weakness in the case for closure, and I am keen to see National Museums Scotland revisit it.

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity, with other South Scotland members of the Scottish Parliament, to meet the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, and I enjoyed what I think was a constructive discussion on the issue. Following that meeting, the MSPs who were in attendance wrote jointly to the board of NMS to add our weight to the calls from Dumfries and Galloway Council and Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce for a decision to be postponed for 12 months to enable wider engagement with local communities and businesses.

That would give NMS time to reflect on the views of those who stand to be affected by the proposals and it would provide a breathing space in which to consider options. A wider consultation would allow different organisational and management structures to be fully explored. For example, a problem that has been identified with Shambellie house is the lack of physical space for the full costume collection. Given the size constraints, could not there be a case for retaining the site but using it for a permanent schedule of rolling exhibitions? There are also opportunities to expand the use of the house as a picturesque location for private events.

During our discussions with the cabinet secretary, I was heartened by her acknowledgement of legitimate concerns, particularly in relation to public consultation. The issue has attracted support from across the chamber and I welcome the cross-party efforts to make progress. I also welcome the work that has been done by my colleagues on Dumfries and Galloway Council, Tom McAughtrie and Davie Stitt, and by my Westminster colleague Russell Brown, whose web campaign has attracted support. Finally, I welcome Alex Fergusson's amendment to my motion, to which I was pleased to add my support.

Shambellie is an important part of the tourism landscape in Dumfries and Galloway, and there is real support for safeguarding its future. The challenge now is to turn the warm words into action.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the constituency member, Alex Fergusson. You have four minutes.

17:12

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I commend Claudia Beamish warmly both for lodging the motion and for prevailing on her business manager to ensure that it came before Parliament timeously. It was important that it did so, and I am delighted to take part in the debate as the constituency member for Galloway and West Dumfries, within which Shambellie house lies.

The BBC's south of Scotland website today headlines the debate's taking place this evening. In doing so, it points out that the proposal to close Shambellie has

"provoked cross-party concern about the possibility of closure and its potential impact on the economy of Dumfries and Galloway."

I want to spend the time that is available to me looking at both halves of that sentence.

First, the issue has "provoked cross-party concern". Claudia Beamish rightly mentioned that, but I cannot emphasise enough how true it is. From the word go, back at the beginning of October, the degree of cross-party support among MSPs on the issue has been quite remarkable for both its consistency and strength, to the extent that, most of us having met individually with NMS director Gordon Rintoul, five of us then met jointly, as Claudia Beamish pointed out, with the cabinet secretary, following which we jointly signed a letter that was sent individually to each trustee of NMS in advance of their meeting next week. I hope that that degree of inter-party and cross-party co-operation does not go unnoticed by those who are responsible for taking the decision on Shambellie.

It does not stop just with us MSPs. As I highlighted in the amendment to Claudia Beamish's motion, to a man and woman Dumfries and Galloway Council, Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce, VisitScotland and other stakeholders, such as ADGAP, are totally united in asking NMS to think again. That is not, I emphasise, to reverse its proposal immediately, because we recognise the very great pressures that NMS, like other organisations, is under, but to give us all a breathing space—a period of grace, if you will—within which we can look sensibly at the many alternative management models that could, although not necessarily would, point the way towards a sustainable future for Shambellie house.

Anyone who is not acquainted with Dumfries and Galloway might ask why we need a future for what is basically an old house that employs only a few people and which closes every winter,

anyway. That brings me to the second part of the BBC's sentence—the part about the

"impact on the economy of Dumfries and Galloway",

which Claudia Beamish quite rightly highlighted. As anyone who lives in that part of the world will know, the local economy is extremely fragile, and within it each small enterprise tends to feed off the others. The closure of one instantly has a major detrimental impact on the others. As Claudia Beamish has, I have had many emails from constituents who are enormously concerned about the impact that closing Shambellie would have on their fragile enterprises.

We live in an age of consultation, and it is NMS's failure to undertake a local open consultation before announcing the closure that has caused most concern to all of us and to the local stakeholders. That needs to be put right, and it can be. It can be put right by ensuring that we are given time—I suggest a year—to explore the very real options that exist for partnership working, innovative thinking and radical solutions that could ensure a future for Shambellie. Thus far, we have been denied the opportunity to do so.

It cannot be right that NMS's facilities become just an asset of the central belt. I cannot help but notice and point out that the flagship of those facilities here in the heart of Edinburgh is absolutely free for all who wish to enter it. We have just one request: give us some more time to take a long hard look at the proposal. If Shambellie house has to close, so be it, but it should not do so before all interested parties have had an opportunity to explore every last prospect of keeping it up and running.

17:16

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Claudia Beamish on securing the debate. I welcome the degree of cross-party consensus that has been shown on the issue and the willingness of members across the chamber to work together to resolve it. In my opinion, partnership working is the solution to the situation that we are discussing.

I thank the cabinet secretary for meeting South Scotland members the other week and for writing to the board of NMS to make it aware of our concerns and of the partnership approach that has been called for by the delegation from Dumfries and Galloway Council and the local chamber of commerce, which met NMS recently.

As members have said, Shambellie is important as part of the national collections and as a visitor attraction in Dumfries and Galloway in its own right. We all understand the financial pressures that are affecting every public body, but it is

precisely these hard times that make the partnership approach essential. We need to look at why Shambellie is so little known, what more it could offer and how it could be promoted. If we can help Shambellie to survive in hard times, it will surely thrive and flourish as our economy strengthens and returns to growth.

As a region, Dumfries and Galloway is accustomed to enticing people to make the relatively lengthy journey to see what it has to offer. The region also has experience of holding seasonal exhibitions that are of national significance, such as the justly praised Monet exhibition that was held in Kirkcudbright in July and August of 2005. That exhibition attracted 60,000 visitors in two months, which is four times the number of visitors that Shambellie attracted in its entire season last year. With the right material and support, Dumfries and Galloway Council and an organising committee of volunteers pulled off an exhibition of major significance that exceeded everyone's expectations.

Moreover, Kirkcudbright has hosted high-profile exhibitions every year since 2000, and the local organising committee—Kirkcudbright 2000—has had the support of the National Galleries of Scotland in doing so. In particular, Kirkcudbright has hosted successful exhibitions covering the work of the Glasgow girls and the Glasgow boys, many of whom had links with the town and drew inspiration from it and its surroundings.

There is no doubt in my mind that Dumfries and Galloway can deliver. The Kirkcudbright experience demonstrates that Dumfries and Galloway has the capacity to succeed at such enterprises, which is why I support the efforts of Dumfries and Galloway Council, the local chamber of commerce, the Association of Dumfries and Galloway Accommodation Providers and Destination Dumfries and Galloway to work with NMS and find a suitable future for Shambellie.

I believe that we can boost Shambellie's profile locally and nationally, thereby increasing visitor numbers and income. We could use Shambellie for many of NMS's loan and visiting exhibition activities in the region, as well as maintaining its role as Scotland's national museum of costume. We could also use it as a venue for events, in the same way that other national museums are used. What is required is the innovation and drive that people in Dumfries and Galloway might like to wear lightly, but which resulted in those 60,000 visitors to Kirkcudbright town hall over two months in 2005.

For that to happen, however, the NMS needs to get round the table with Dumfries and Galloway Council and the other local bodies to which I referred, and to work to take forward that vision and make it reality.

NMS has a serious offer from local players who genuinely want to help, even though their own budgets are under real pressure. Not only that, they are local players that have a track record in overcoming distance and obscurity to net visitor numbers that anyone could envy.

I also wrote recently to the cabinet secretary about the ownership issue of Shambellie house. In her reply, the cabinet secretary stated that the house comes under the property of Scottish ministers and that, should the NMS decide to close the museum, it will become the responsibility of the Scottish Government to maintain it and keep it secure.

Although the decision on Shambellie is for the trustees of National Museums Scotland to make, I hope that they are willing to enter into real partnership working in Dumfries and Galloway and to give us time to consider the options, not just to save Shambellie, but to enhance and improve it for the future.

17:21

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I congratulate Claudia Beamish on securing the debate on an issue of considerable importance to Dumfries and Galloway and I also express my support for Alex Fergusson's amendment.

Shambellie is not in my constituency, but I was surprised that the first I learned of plans to close the national museum of costume at the end of the season on 31 October was when I received an email earlier that month from one of the nine members of staff there who is to be made redundant. I was shocked to learn of the imminent closure of this important visitor attraction in Dumfries and Galloway in that way and with so little notice. Other members of the community—Claudia Beamish has mentioned many—including the Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce, were equally taken aback by the short notice and the lack of consultation with anyone outside the board of NMS.

NMS has provided a list of reasons for taking that decision. However, neither the board nor the director has seen fit to ask local people what the museum means to them or for their views on how visitor numbers might be increased. My colleague Councillor Tom McCaughtrie is one of the representatives of the Abbey ward on Dumfries and Galloway Council, in which Shambellie resides. He has suggested, for example, that introducing a day ticket that gives admission to three attractions in the area—Shambellie, the Corn mill and Sweetheart abbey—could boost visitor numbers to all three attractions. However, it seems that there has been no attempt to seek innovative solutions.

Claudia Beamish has demonstrated that the cost per visitor to Shambellie is not very different from other NMS facilities as a whole. Indeed, Shambellie costs less than 1 per cent of the total NMS budget, so why pick on Dumfries and Galloway? The importance of tourism to Scotland has been demonstrated this very week by two Government-led debates on tourism, and tourism is especially important to rural areas such as ours. We have a terrific tourism offering in Dumfries and Galloway—landscape, food, culture and heritage. Why close the part of the NMS collection that is situated in our area?

Instead of applying a creative approach to identify how the facility might be promoted and expanded—we have heard a number of excellent suggestions in the debate and I am sure that there are more to come—the approach of NMS has simply been to cut. It has cut without consultation with staff, and without consultation with the local community or local tourism operators and businesses. Would NMS have done that if Shambellie was situated in the central belt or even in the Highlands rather than in Dumfries and Galloway? We in Dumfries and Galloway suspect not.

Ministers say—and it is true—that this is an operational matter for NMS and that they cannot intervene. However, NMS will receive almost £21 million in revenue and capital support from the Scottish Government this year. Recently, we have seen the chairman of a further education college resign under pressure from a Scottish Government minister. I am not asking the culture secretary to exert any pressure of that nature, but I wonder whether she could perhaps exert a little pressure to try to persuade the NMS board to think again and to preserve Shambellie—at least for the next 12 months, as suggested by Dumfries and Galloway Council—to preserve the jobs that it supports, and to work to canvass fresh and innovative ideas for a sustainable future.

17:24

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I congratulate Claudia Beamish on securing the debate.

The national museum of costume is situated in a rural corner of Scotland, but it is undoubtedly of national cultural importance and therefore it deserves to have a platform in the chamber. With the threat of closure that hangs over Shambellie house, party differences have been cast aside in favour of a united front by parliamentarians throughout South Scotland. Cross-party meetings with National Museums Scotland officials, including Mr Rintoul, and the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, and co-authored

letters represent the depth of feeling that exists on the proposal to close Shambellie house.

The justification that I have routinely heard in favour of the proposal is that there are low visitor numbers to the museum, and that there is high operational spend per visitor and reduced public funding, but there is little mention of how important the siting of a national museum is to the small surrounding communities of Lochfoot, Glencaple and, of course, New Abbey, which has a population of fewer than 100 people. If the national museum of costume is removed from the area, a crucial element will be removed from those communities.

The sparsity of population spread in Dumfries and Galloway means that leisure and tourist pursuits in the region are largely interconnected. For example, a tourist's visit to Shambellie house may coincide with a visit to the artist town of Kirkcudbright and the book town of Wigtown. I fear that the closure of Shambellie house may impact on other cultural pursuits in Dumfries and Galloway and on local businesses in New Abbey that rely on visitors to the village.

As the proposal comes just over a year after National Museums Scotland completed the £47 million refurbishment of its flagship museum in Edinburgh, there is understandable concern among many of my constituents about a centralist agenda among officials at NMS. That is reinforced by figures that suggest that spending on Shambellie house represents just 0.68 per cent of National Museums Scotland's annual budget, and that only an additional 44p per visitor is spent on Shambellie house visitors compared with the average for visitors to other facilities. That does little to dissuade people from thinking that Dumfries and Galloway is being neglected.

I have met NMS officials twice, and fully appreciate that, in an age of reduced public funding, various difficult decisions will need to be made, but the decision in question should not be one of them. Dangling the carrot of roving exhibitions throughout the region will not prove to be a sufficient replacement for a museum that has been anchored in the area for 30 years. That is an intriguing prospect, but that should not come at the expense of Shambellie house, and there is little detail to consider.

During my discussions, I have asked Dr Rintoul whether NMS has fully explored all the avenues. If visitor numbers are too low, how can we boost them? Is Shambellie house being marketed in the correct fashion? If costs per visitor are indeed too high, are there not ways to tackle that matter without the drastic choice of a full closure? All those questions need to be answered, and they are worthy of further exploration. That is all the more reason why I support Dumfries and Galloway

Council's calls for a 12-month stay of execution at least.

Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce and Gordon Mann in particular deserve great credit for sustaining the save our Shambellie campaign and keeping us parliamentarians regularly updated.

The debate has been excellent and passionate, and there have been notable contributions from all members who have spoken. I am sure that there will be more to come. The cabinet secretary can surely be left in no doubt about the value of the national museum of costume to Dumfries and Galloway and she must now, of course, work with NMS officials and everybody else to ensure that it is retained.

17:28

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Claudia Beamish on securing the debate, and echo the sentiments of my colleague Aileen McLeod and those that other members across the chamber have expressed about the importance of all parties demonstrating willingness to work together to resolve the issue. I also thank the cabinet secretary for recognising the importance of Shambellie house to the south-west region by chairing the meeting that has already been mentioned, which brought together elected members and representatives of the management of National Museums Scotland.

I note, too, the strongly worded letter that the cabinet secretary sent to the museum's board of trustees conveying our local concerns. Of course, the cabinet secretary cannot and should not directly intervene in operational decisions. I know that only too well because, when I sat on the committee that scrutinised the recent National Library of Scotland Bill, Opposition members rightly made it clear that they did not want ministers—now or in the distant future—to have any say at all in matters that could be perceived as being even remotely curatorial. That said, I was pleased that the cabinet secretary acknowledged the strength of local feeling at the meeting, and I was pleased to hear her tell the meeting that National Museums Scotland should come up with a better offer for Dumfries and Galloway. I will focus on what that better offer might be.

Charles Stewart inherited Shambellie house from his father in 1962. He had, by that time, collected more than 6,000 costume pieces over the course of three decades. Fearing that the large Victorian house would be expensive to maintain and that his treasured collection would be dispersed after his death, Stewart concluded that by offering his house and collection to the then Royal Scottish Museum he could save both. He

did that successfully but, as we have heard, in recent years visitor numbers to Shambellie house have not been as high as they could be.

Static collections can suffer from declining visitor numbers, and we need to keep changing the offering in our museums and galleries to keep up the public's interest. We could explore that during the stay of execution that has been suggested, and I make a small suggestion of my own. We already have a famous brand in National Museums Scotland. Following the relaunch of the national museum of Scotland in Edinburgh last summer, a series of interviews throughout Scotland showed that the overall awareness of National Museums Scotland had risen substantially from 59 per cent to 78 per cent of the adult population. It is a great brand, and great brands open satellites. We have seen that in the Bilbao Guggenheim, the Centre Pompidou-Metz, the Tate of Liverpool and St Ives, and the Louvres that are coming to the northern French town of Lens and Abu Dhabi. The Victoria and Albert—the world's leading museum of art and design—will soon come to Dundee. As other members have said, Shambellie house could be the hub for visiting exhibitions in the region. A satellite would be a nice idea, and that is why I am putting it forward. I am aware that we live in constrained times, but a year's grace would give us the opportunity to explore all sorts of options.

Our national collections are precious and say much about Scotland as a country and a culture, and that story needs to be told in every corner of our nation. National Museums Scotland states that its prime purpose is to hold the national collections that it manages in trust for the people of Scotland in perpetuity and to enable access to them for as large and as broad an audience as possible. Closing the national museum of costume at New Abbey flies in the face of enabling access for as broad an audience as possible.

National Museums Scotland claims that it operates on the basis of four main values: being creative by using innovation and thriving on good ideas; being generous; being collaborative; and being forward thinking. I say to it, "Prove it." National Museums Scotland has had plenty of innovative ideas thrown at it, both tonight and in discussions with local MSPs, Dumfries and Galloway Council, the local chamber of commerce, the Association of Dumfries and Galloway Accommodation Providers and Destination Dumfries and Galloway. I echo the cabinet secretary's call to send a strong message to National Museums Scotland that it must come up with a better offer for Dumfries and Galloway.

17:33

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Claudia Beamish on securing the debate and recognise the MSPs who represent constituencies in the south of Scotland and the list members for the region who have worked so co-operatively in support of the national museum of costume. I also commend my friend and colleague Russell Brown MP for his hard work in that regard, as well as the local councillors for the area who care deeply about the issue.

To me, Shambellie house, the national museum of flight and the national museum of rural life are as important to our understanding of our culture and history as the national museum buildings that are located here in Edinburgh. Indeed, one could argue that, to be truly national and to do justice to its name, our national museum requires to have collections distributed throughout the country.

Museums and galleries can be as important to our tourism offering as scenery and weather. In fact, with weather as varied as ours, many tourists plan their holidays around the wet weather option that a museum or gallery can enjoyably be. Shambellie house therefore has great potential. The building itself is interesting, the gardens and grounds are an attraction and the cafe is a welcome oasis. Perhaps, as we heard, Shambellie house needs help to realise its full potential through better marketing.

The collection, or at least the part of it that is available to view, is a must for anyone who has an interest in clothes and accessories or in the social history of our country. The staff have been creative and imaginative in organising the exhibits in a small space but, as we heard, the exhibition is fairly static. I realise that visitor numbers are relatively low, but "relative" is the operative word in a part of the country that is working hard to promote its appeal as a tourist destination.

I do not blame NMS for the situation that Shambellie house faces. Perhaps it could have consulted better and taken its plans forward less precipitately. However, it is reacting to the funding situation that it faces. I simply suggest that a little more creativity and thought should be put into the plans.

Could NMS think about using the winter season to host exhibitions of its other treasures? Could colleagues in the national collections work together to use Shambellie as a venue for ready-made exhibitions, which might previously have been on show in Edinburgh? Aileen McLeod was right to mention the Monet exhibition and the Glasgow girls and Glasgow boys exhibitions of previous years. The exhibitions had appeared in Glasgow and were taken off the shelf. Taking an

exhibition off the shelf is not easy and involves much time, effort and money, but it can be done with great success, as we heard.

Paxton house, the family home of our former colleague John Home Robertson, houses a magnificent collection of 18th century men's costumes, which are thought to have been worn by Patrick Home at the court of Frederick the Great. Could Paxton and Shambellie work together to complement each other's collections, linking east and west? The idea could be considered.

A year's stay of execution is a sensible suggestion from members and I very much hope that MNS—I mean NMS; I never get that right—can be assisted in finding a way to preserve Shambellie house, not just for Dumfries and Galloway, important though that is, but for the rest of the country.

17:37

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I thank members for their speeches. It has been most helpful and interesting to hear their comments and to hear about the strong views that I know are held in Dumfries and Galloway. I heard those views at first hand from local MSPs when I convened the meeting with them on 7 November.

As members said, the potential closure of the museum of costume is an operational decision for the National Museums Scotland board of trustees, which operates at arm's length from ministers. As Claudia Beamish, who secured the debate, will acknowledge, the debate is timely, because the board of NMS next meets on 23 November. I stress that no final decision has been made.

I am very much aware that there is strong feeling about and strong cross-party support for the campaign, as Alex Fergusson said.

Members acknowledged that we must maintain the operational independence of our national collections—the point was well made by Joan McAlpine.

I appreciate that there is a good deal of concern about the potential closure of the museum of costume. That is why I welcome the discussions that NMS has held with local members. We have been able to discuss the challenges that the museum's continued operation presents and other options in Dumfries and Galloway for access to the national collections. I appreciate the constructive nature of the cross-party discussions that I have had and am having with local members. I wrote to the NMS board to make them aware of MSPs' views.

The key question is how we get more than 10,000 paying visitors into Dumfries and Galloway. Joan McAlpine was right to say that we need to consider how to improve the offer that Dumfries and Galloway provides. We need to work collectively to secure improvement.

I should let members know that I met with the chair and the director of NMS on 14 November to hear directly their views on the future of the museum of costume and NMS activity in the area. From that meeting, I know that the NMS board is taking public responses to the proposed closure seriously and looking actively at alternative activity in the area. I will send the board the *Official Report* of the debate as further input to its deliberations.

NMS has operated a site at Shambellie for 30 years. From discussions with NMS, I know that it has a strong commitment to providing access to national collections across Scotland. Whatever the final decision on the museum of costume, the NMS board has emphasised its continuing commitment to supporting activities in Dumfries and Galloway. In the debate, we have said that there needs to be an improved offer regarding NMS's activity.

The Scottish Government is committed to investing in Dumfries and Galloway, and Elaine Murray was slightly off the mark when she questioned that commitment. Most recently, we provided £100,000 to the Dark Sky Observatory. Through winter festivals funding, we are supporting the big Burns supper in Dumfries. Creative Scotland, Historic Scotland and EventScotland continue to support development in the region. Indeed, Creative Scotland has provided £2.2 million to projects, organisations and individuals in Dumfries and Galloway since 2010.

Members may also know that I was instrumental in saving the Crichton campus and that I was Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning when £27 million was allocated to the new Dumfries and Galloway College and library. I am personally committed to supporting the region.

NMS has been clear with me that the cost of operating the museum at Shambellie is a challenge for it. I understand that income from visitors to the site covers less than 10 per cent of the site's operating costs. As a result, it requires a much higher level of subsidy per visitor than any other NMS site.

In this tough financial climate, with deep cuts in public spending that are being imposed by the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Government has protected funding for the arts and culture as far as possible. I have been keen to protect the Scottish Government's grant to NMS against a background of significant cuts in the

current spending review. The grant in this financial year has been protected from any cuts. NMS will receive a 0.5 per cent core grant reduction in 2013-14, which is a much better position than that of other organisations in the sector.

I recognise the challenging general financial climate faced by NMS, such as rising costs in utility bills in its large estate. As with all public bodies, it is rightly implementing the living wage for lower-paid members of staff. A rising core cost base and a lower income from the public purse mean that NMS, like most public bodies, needs to increase income from other sources and look seriously at how it lives within its means. There are constraints with Shambellie house: the building has small rooms and there have been only two weddings in seven years, despite marketing and publicity drives.

Alex Fergusson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Fiona Hyslop: I will take an intervention in a minute.

Patricia Ferguson is absolutely right that we should look at creative solutions. I caution that winter opening might compound the requirement for subsidy, but she made some very good suggestions that the board will be able to examine when I give it a copy of the *Official Report*.

Alex Fergusson: I gently suggest that if Shambellie house had only two weddings after seven years of promotion, it could have perhaps promoted the possibility a little better.

At portfolio question time today, I asked the cabinet secretary whether she would welcome an extension to give us time to talk about the radical solutions that we have all referred to today. I am not asking her to intervene in the NMS's decision-making process, but would she welcome such an extension? It would be welcome if she did.

Fiona Hyslop: I would welcome a greater opportunity for time for consultation on a better offer for Dumfries and Galloway. I will not tie the hands of the NMS board as to what that timeframe might be, because, as we discussed at our meeting, the key period will be what is anticipated as being the normal April opening. I would welcome the opportunity for time for consultation, but I leave that to the board and its decision making. Members should remember that the board meeting is in only a few days' time.

I recognise the concern about the potential impact on the local tourism industry of the museum's closure. Although the figures of 10,000 paying visitors and 5,000 visitors to the cafe comprise a small percentage of the total numbers of visitors to NMS sites—as several members have said—and are certainly lower than those for

other key tourism sites in Dumfries and Galloway, I recognise the museum's importance to the local area.

I strongly encourage local parties to work together with NMS to consider alternative solutions. Joan McAlpine's idea for an NMS gallery that would involve a wider perspective rather than focusing simply on costumes is very good and is worth looking at. It is important that we strengthen the cultural tourism offer in Dumfries and Galloway and provide access to the national collections.

The NMS director, Dr Rintoul, is inviting council representatives to meet him at Shambellie house next month with a view to discussing the potential for developing a partnership to provide greater access to the national collections through other means, and I am sure that he will report on that.

Finally, there is the question of the house itself. As Aileen McLeod pointed out, and as I confirmed in my reply to her, the house is the property of Scottish ministers. If the NMS decides to close the museum of costume, it will become the Scottish Government's responsibility to maintain Shambellie house and keep it secure. In that case, I would absolutely be open to considering suitable proposals for the use of the site from the local community or the wider Dumfries and Galloway region, within public finance rules.

I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the matter and to set out the Scottish Government's position. The final decision on the museum's future rests with the NMS. However, I know that the NMS remains committed to exploring options to improve access to its collections for the people of Dumfries and Galloway, and I will continue to be happy to facilitate and take part in those discussions.

Meeting closed at 17:46.

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