



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 18 March 2014

Session 4

---

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - [www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk) or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

---

**Tuesday 18 March 2014**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>TIME FOR REFLECTION</b> .....	28991
<b>TOPICAL QUESTION TIME</b> .....	28993
Curriculum for Excellence .....	28993
Faslane Naval Dockyard .....	28998
<b>NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 3 AND SCOTTISH PLANNING POLICY</b> .....	29001
<i>Motion moved—[Kevin Stewart].</i>	
Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP) .....	29001
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	29004
Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP) .....	29006
Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP) .....	29009
The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay) .....	29011
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab) .....	29016
Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con) .....	29020
Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP) .....	29022
Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab) .....	29024
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP) .....	29026
Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD) .....	29028
Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP) .....	29031
Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab) .....	29033
Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP) .....	29036
Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab) .....	29039
Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP) .....	29041
Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green) .....	29044
Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP) .....	29046
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con) .....	29049
Sarah Boyack .....	29051
Derek Mackay .....	29054
John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP) .....	29058
<b>STANDARDS COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND (REAPPOINTMENT OF MEMBER)</b> .....	29062
<i>Motion moved—[Liam McArthur].</i>	
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD) .....	29062
<b>DECISION TIME</b> .....	29064
<b>DOWN'S SYNDROME AWARENESS WEEK</b> .....	29065
<i>Motion debated—[John Wilson].</i>	
John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP) .....	29065
Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP) .....	29067
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab) .....	29069
Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con) .....	29071
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP) .....	29073
The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil) .....	29074

---



## Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 18 March 2014*

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

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Safa Yousaf, the schools development officer for Amina—the Muslim Women’s Resource Centre.

**Safa Yousaf (Amina—the Muslim Women’s Resource Centre):** In the name of God, the most merciful and most kind.

Having a brother who is an MSP at the moment, I have seen at first hand how hectic and difficult the past year has been and the next few months will be. As much as I sympathise with how stressful things must be for you at the moment, I stand here in solidarity with all of your family members, who are probably seeing you less and are complaining that they need to make an appointment with your secretary just to have the pleasure of your company. Or maybe Humza is just trying to avoid us.

When work gets even busier and more stressful, it is important that we take time out to reflect and connect back to our purpose. In Islam, we are given opportunities throughout the day to reconnect through the medium of prayer, taking five to 10 minutes five times a day and proclaiming that God is greater than our work, our family and all the other stresses of our day.

In line with this, perhaps something that we can all practise is to take five to 10 minutes throughout our day to remind ourselves of why we are here, especially when the pressure of work increases.

In the five to 10 minutes that you take out daily, perhaps you can cast your memory back to the moment you were first elected and remind yourself of, and reflect upon, the energy, drive and sense of purpose that you had to make a positive change. Although that passion has hopefully never left you, your daily reflections may well ensure that you remain steadily on the path of serving those who entrusted you with such an honourable position.

In the eyes of Muslims, it is hard to find someone in history who was busier than the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, yet his character and sincerity towards people were flawless and faultless. He made time for his family and upheld his beautiful character despite the

stresses that came his way. He never forgot his purpose. Even his enemies struggled to talk negatively about him and—much like Christ Jesus, peace be upon him—he only reciprocated harsh words with kindness. Who knows—perhaps adopting such an approach might make for interesting exchanges in Parliaments around the world!

In the next few months, it is important that we do not lose our sense of purpose and good character. As the Muslim Sufi poet Jalal Ud-Din Rumi said,

“Raise your words, not your voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.”

## Topical Question Time

14:03

### Curriculum for Excellence

**1. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the resignation of the head of the curriculum for excellence ahead of the first sitting of the new national exams. (S4T-00635)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** The Scottish Qualifications Authority has made it clear that the new qualifications will be unaffected. The individual, Mr Roderic Gillespie, is part of just one of eight different teams within the SQA that have been involved in the curriculum for excellence and the SQA is, of course, one of the 17 different organisations—ranging from local authorities to teaching unions, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government—that are involved in the delivery of CFE.

I should also make it clear that, although Mr Gillespie was involved in the development of the exams, he has not been involved in their implementation. Given that we are now only 42 days from the first exam, it is fair to say that we are long past the point at which development was complete. That said, Mr Gillespie remains in post until after the first national exam has been taken, by which time all development work relating to the new highers will also be complete. Therefore, it is little surprise that the SQA, along with the other partners that are involved in delivering CFE, is able to say with confidence that the new qualifications will be unaffected by the change in personnel.

The introduction of the new qualifications remains on track. The Scottish Government and its partners have provided an unprecedented level of support to help teachers and schools to prepare for curriculum for excellence and the national qualifications, which were developed with considerable input from stakeholders and with broad support. The most recent support package was announced on 21 February and was widely welcomed.

**Kezia Dugdale:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but I assure him that parents remain concerned. Yesterday, I received an email from a concerned parent who, following the resignation, said:

“Is there something so wrong that he wants to leave before he has to deal with sorting out the mess that he has created?”

They went on to say:

“News of Mr Gillespie’s resignation does not give me confidence and has made me even more worried about the way the new exams have been introduced ... There seems to be constant testing with no time for consolidation in class. My son has continually complained about the courses being rushed and about mistakes in the course materials that are being used to help revise. He was told in one class they did not have time to review the prelim paper. We have had to purchase extra resources at considerable expense to help him study for his exams. Not all parents are lucky enough to be in a position to afford this for their children.”

What does the cabinet secretary have to say to that parent? Is he proud of his Government’s record on the delivery of curriculum for excellence and the new exams? Will he take full responsibility for them?

**Michael Russell:** It is important that, when people who are involved in education—this applies to people at every level—have concerns, they raise those concerns in the way that is most supportive of young people, particularly young learners. With 42 days to go to the exams, I stand with Jackie Brock, the chief executive officer of Children in Scotland, who, on this issue, today said:

“Young people themselves will not be worrying about the departure of one individual from the SQA. Their main priority right now is to study and revise for their exams. They deserve the best in consistent support from all of us.”

I have some advice for the member who asked the question: it is probably best to contact the SQA to ask a question before contacting the newspapers. That will provide the best support that can be given to our young people.

I would be happy to outline for the member, either here or in writing, the very substantial support that has been in place for many years for the new national qualifications. Such support for CFE remains in place, and it has been warmly welcomed by the teaching unions, among others, every time we have put it in place.

We now need to move towards the first diet of exams—which I stress is only 42 days away—in a way that supports our learners and does not simply seek publicity for politicians.

**Kezia Dugdale:** The cabinet secretary says that the support package has been warmly welcomed by the Educational Institute of Scotland. That is the EIS that said that it has not encountered such widespread anger, disappointment and frustration with the exams authority as it is currently witnessing. I do not blame the SQA; I blame the cabinet secretary. It will be his responsibility when this goes wrong.

I point the cabinet secretary to what is happening at Prestwick academy, which he seems to be unaware of. The parents and the headteacher there have made the situation known

to the authorities but have received no response. There is a serious shortage of chemistry teachers at Prestwick academy, such that it will not be possible to teach the CFE course in its entirety before the day of the exam. Therefore, the headteacher is having to get in teachers from other local authority areas to teach the children on a Saturday to ensure that they can complete the coursework before the day of the exam.

Is the cabinet secretary aware that, according to SQA guidelines, that will not be counted as exceptional circumstances when the tests are reviewed and marked? Does he think that that is acceptable? Will he take steps to ensure that, when his Government has failed to implement the national curriculum properly, pupils will not pay the heaviest price?

**Michael Russell:** Of course, there is no national curriculum in Scotland. That is a fairly basic piece of information that requires to be known. Curriculum for excellence is a methodology—it is a means of teaching.

We work very closely with the SQA and Education Scotland in taking an overview of all developments in Scotland. The member is conflating a variety of different issues. I hope that she is doing so out of a genuine lack of knowledge of education in Scotland. If she is doing so to create an atmosphere in which the young people who are studying for these exams, which are 42 days away, will be put in a position of fear and concern, that would be—I choose the word carefully—reprehensible. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Mr Bibby.

**Michael Russell:** As far as the response of the unions is concerned, let me quote Larry Flanagan, who is the general secretary of the EIS. When the latest package of support was announced on 21 February, he said:

“The EIS believes that this new support package is a positive development that will be very welcome in our secondary schools.”

Alan McKenzie, who is the acting general secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association, said:

“This is a welcome announcement ... The review to the verification arrangements particularly for this year should have a positive impact on the concerns of our members.”

I ask the member to keep to the consensus in support of CFE, which has been extremely important in the Parliament, and to think of Scotland's young people more than she thinks about getting her name in the newspapers.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that we must continue in the spirit in which

curriculum for excellence was created, which was one of co-operative working across all the parties to support Scotland's pupils and teachers as they take the curriculum forward and deliver lasting improvements in Scottish education?

**Michael Russell:** I very much agree that the consensus that we have developed in Scottish education around the introduction of CFE—although that consensus has not been without its difficulties, it has lasted right through the life of this Parliament—has meant that we have been able to ensure the best interests of Scotland's young people and the best possible support for all teachers. At the end of the day, that is what is going to succeed. If anybody departs from that as, regrettably, we have seen in the past 24 hours, the losers will be Scotland's young people. Every member in the chamber needs to think about that very carefully indeed.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** The cabinet secretary will acknowledge that it has been a trying past few months. The Scottish Government has made a couple of interventions in response to concerns that have been raised as we move towards the first diet of the exams. In that light and bearing in mind his acknowledgement that lessons would need to be learned as we move forward not just with the new highers but with the national 4 and 5 qualifications, does he think that the effort to learn lessons will be hindered by the departure of Mr Gillespie, who was a key player in the roll-out of the examinations?

**Michael Russell:** I do not think that it will be affected in the slightest. As far as I am aware, Mr Gillespie is not going to Mars. He will of course be available if anybody wants to speak to him. He is actually being promoted in another organisation, which probably gives the lie to the view that there is something wrong in this. The statement from the SQA was very clear. I have had sight of the email to Kezia Dugdale from Janet Brown, who is in charge of the SQA. It is very important that Janet Brown, as the head of the SQA, is listened to. [*Interruption.*] Mr Bibby is shouting. It is quite important that members do not shout and do not seek to put themselves on the front of newspapers. [*Laughter.*] I am sorry that there is laughter on this issue. It is really important for Scotland's young people that we listen to this: with 42 days to go to the exams, Scotland will best be served by making sure that the consensus on CFE continues in place. As Jackie Brock said, for young people,

“Their main priority right now is to study and revise for their exams. They deserve the best in consistent support from all of us.”

Of course there are lessons to be learned. In a previous debate in the chamber, I not only confirmed the Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development's view, but, in response to what I thought were very important questions from the Tory front bench, confirmed that the curriculum for excellence management group would take a special look at what has taken place in the past few months. I think that that is an important reassurance. What is not reassuring is people who try to grandstand on the issue. They can only damage young people.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** As Ms Dugdale has raised the specific issue of Prestwick academy, which is in my constituency, can the cabinet secretary assure Parliament that he will take an interest in Prestwick academy and offer all support to it and its headteacher, Mr Bone, and South Ayrshire Council in their efforts to find chemistry teachers for the school at this time?

**Michael Russell:** The constituency member has spoken to me before when teacher supply issues have arisen in his constituency and he knows that I have been very positive in trying to assist, and that is what the Government will do. However, what the member did of course was raise those issues with me directly. He did not come to the chamber and use them as a back-up argument for another story. If constituency members and others have concerns, of course we will try to make sure that everything is done to support Scottish education. Supporting Scottish education is the job that I undertake. I would have hoped that other members, too, thought that they had a role to play in that.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** The lack of leadership and the complacency that we have seen from the cabinet secretary on the implementation of the new exams have been breathtaking. It is completely unacceptable to treat kids sitting their exams in that way. It is a mess of the cabinet secretary's making and he will need to answer major questions after the exam diet but, at the moment, he is the man who is ultimately responsible and he needs to sort it out.

**The Presiding Officer:** Could we just have a question, Mr Bibby?

**Neil Bibby:** Teachers and pupils have asked for free exam practice papers. Where are they? What is Mike Russell going to do to alleviate the other concerns of teachers, pupils and parents? If he is so confident that everything in the garden is rosy, will he give a clear, categorical assurance today on the record that everything will go to plan with the new highers and the new exams?

**Michael Russell:** Dr Allan takes day-to-day responsibility for the SQA, and he and I have been giving that assurance. I have been doing it since I became cabinet secretary, because I have actually been working on this issue. The unfortunate thing that we have seen from Ms Dugdale and Mr Bibby

is that they have been trying to get themselves publicity. That is not positive when we are 42 days from the exam diet.

The list of the support that the Government, along with others, has given to CFE speaks for itself. From 2011 onwards, we have been adding support into the system and doing what is needed. What we have not been doing is trying to undermine confidence in the system for party-political advantage. I have to say, though, that doing that does not gain party-political advantage, given the response that I have had from most people who read the news item in question and spoke to me. When I explained the circumstances, they were disgusted that politicians would behave in that way. For the sake of Scotland's young people, that should stop now. The consensus on CFE is that it is going to make a difference. That consensus has got us here, and to try to break it now is very foolish indeed.

### Faslane Naval Dockyard

**2. Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on reports that the Ministry of Defence is seeking to increase the level of liquid waste that it discharges into the Clyde at Faslane naval dockyard. (S4T-00642)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** The Scottish Environment Protection Agency has been reviewing the agreement with the MOD that covers the disposal of radioactive waste into the Clyde from Faslane, and it proposes to lower the permitted limits of discharges from the site. Although that more stringent regime should, in theory, benefit our environment, the MOD has indicated that the actual levels of discharges from the site may increase over the next few years due to the increasing number of submarines that will be based there, albeit that the discharges are expected to be well within the new limits. Although I welcome SEPA's plans to strengthen the permitted limits for the site, this is another example of an agreement between SEPA and the MOD that is not legally binding. Last week, I announced that we propose to remove the Crown exemption for MOD sites in Scotland, which will give SEPA a binding mandate to regulate instead of relying on a gentlemen's agreement in such circumstances.

**Stuart McMillan:** Given the secrecy of the MOD regarding the incident at the Vulcan site, information about which has recently emerged, can we be sure that SEPA has been made aware of the full details regarding the situation at Faslane?

**Richard Lochhead:** It is fair to say that the Vulcan incident, which was discussed in the



chamber last week, has broken the trust that existed between the MOD and the people of Scotland. That is why we have given a commitment to remove the Crown exemption for such sites, so that SEPA can be empowered to regulate those sites as it regulates every other site in Scotland. We must tackle the culture of secrecy that was unveiled following the discovery of the Vulcan incident and make sure that we do not have such an incident in the future.

**Stuart McMillan:** It is concerning that the MOD has a culture of secrecy around its activity. Recent Westminster parliamentary answers have revealed that the Secretary of State for Scotland was not informed of the incident at the Vulcan site until more than eight months after it happened, despite the Secretary of State for Defence claiming that key ministers were informed throughout. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the so-called respect agenda has disappeared?

**Richard Lochhead:** Following the events surrounding the Vulcan incident, which could not have been more serious given that it involved radioactivity and MOD sites that have nuclear facilities, I, too, think that the respect agenda has been abandoned.

The Secretary of State for Defence, Philip Hammond, stated in the House of Commons recently:

“Key Ministers within the Government were, of course, aware of these issues throughout.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 6 March 2014; Vol 576, c 1081.]

He was referring to United Kingdom ministers. However, I understand that Alistair Carmichael, the current Secretary of State for Scotland, has just revealed in a parliamentary answer in the House of Commons that the former Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Moore, was not told about the incident at the Vulcan site until more than eight months after it occurred—in contradiction to Philip Hammond’s claim that key ministers were kept in the loop. That is despite the fact that the former secretary of state, Michael Moore, visited the Vulcan plant in April 2012, at a time when it was shut down due to the incident.

If the Scotland Office ministers are not being kept in the loop—as well as the local community, the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government and the wider people of Scotland—it is understandable why people believe that there is a culture of secrecy and cover-ups within the MOD in Scotland.

**Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con):** The background to Stuart McMillan’s question assumes that Scotland will remain within the United Kingdom and that thousands of new jobs will be created at Faslane, not destroyed by the Scottish National Party. Will the cabinet secretary

confirm what submission the Scottish Government has made to the SEPA consultation and, post a no vote in September, how the Scottish Government will engage with the MOD on a regular basis?

**Richard Lochhead:** Following its consultation, SEPA will share the conclusions that it reaches with the Scottish ministers in due course. In terms of the impact on the referendum debate, it is now clearer than ever before that we need a yes vote so that Scotland can become independent and we can make the decision, as a people, that we do not want nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed submarines based in Scotland but would much rather that the investment be devoted to more conventional defence forces and other jobs and needs in Scotland.

## National Planning Framework 3 and Scottish Planning Policy

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-09355, in the name of Kevin Stewart, on the Scottish Government's third national planning framework and the review of Scottish planning policy.

I call Kevin Stewart to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee.

14:20

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** I am pleased to open on behalf of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee the debate on the Scottish Government's proposed third national planning framework for Scotland. I thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the committee on the proposed framework. I also thank my colleagues on the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee and the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee for the co-ordinated approach that they adopted with us, as the lead committee, in scrutinising the framework. That level of co-operation on a shared interest shows the Parliament's committee system at its best.

Land use planning is one of the most important policy functions that local and national Government undertakes. That is because planning is integral to the success of many other policies, such as community planning, regeneration, sustainable economic development, energy generation, transport, housing and mitigating the impacts of climate change, to name just a few. It is important that the national planning framework also sets out developments that the Scottish Government has identified as being of national-level importance to the economic, social, physical and spatial development of Scottish society.

I know that my fellow conveners who will take part in the debate will speak further on many of those issues, which they have examined as part of their committees' scrutiny of the framework. It will be for our respective successor committees in the next parliamentary session to consider how they will approach their scrutiny of the successor to the proposed third framework, but I commend the approach that we and our fellow committees have taken.

For our part, the Local Government and Regeneration Committee—as the lead committee with responsibility for scrutinising planning policy—decided to focus our scrutiny on the draft

framework's strategic connections to other key policy areas, such as the national performance framework, community-led regeneration and the community planning system. We also considered the consultation process that the Scottish Government undertook as part of the framework's development, as well as the role that the Parliament and its committees played in developing planning policy.

Our report on the framework considers issues such as how to improve the public's understanding of, and engagement with, planning policy and the planning system. We also examined the Scottish Government's on-going review of the Scottish planning policy, which is a key part of the planning system.

As the Minister for Local Government and Planning has told us more than once, the national planning framework sets out where we wish development to take place and the Scottish planning policy sets out how we wish that development to take place. Those two key documents therefore form the cornerstone of our modern planning system. We commend the minister for deciding to review those key policy documents in tandem with each other.

The current legal framework for our planning system is based on the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. That was supplemented and updated by the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006, which, among other things, placed the national planning framework on a statutory footing.

In our report, we said:

“land use planning and development is, by its very nature, complex, contentious, and laden with real or perceived contradictions. It is one of the few areas of national policy on which almost everyone in society will hold some sort of opinion. Planning is one of the clearest examples of where the often opaque and impersonal process of making difficult decisions for the needs of society at large comes face-to-face with peoples' everyday individual and family lives in the places where they live.”

That is why it matters that we get the planning system right.

I turn to some of the specifics of our report. We went into some depth. Several witnesses commented on the 60-day statutory period within which the Parliament must consider the proposed framework.

All the groups that we heard from agreed that there is value to be added by the Parliament giving greater consideration to the principles that underpin the development of the framework and the criteria by which Government decides which national developments should be set out in it.

We welcome the detailed consultation that the Scottish Government has undertaken in

developing the framework and the focus on delivering a plan-led system for Scottish planning. There was quite a lot of praise for that detailed consultation.

The committee recommended that the development of the next planning framework should begin with the Parliament considering the principles and criteria on which it should be based. That includes debating the types of national development that the framework may contain, and that process should precede any public consultation by Government on a future framework. That is spelled out in paragraphs 55 and 83 of our report.

The national planning framework and the Scottish planning policy are complementary documents. We believe that the Government should adopt, as standard practice, a review of Scottish planning policy in parallel with the development of future frameworks. We also recommend that the Government consider working towards merging the framework and the Scottish planning policy, as far as practical, into a single national plan.

One issue that was drawn to our attention was the need for a spatial framework to reflect how Scotland connects to Europe and the wider world. We recommended that the finalised third national planning framework should reflect the international aspect of spatial connectivity as well as recognise Scotland's planning system within a wider European context.

The committee was concerned to learn that only a few of Scotland's 32 local authorities currently have up-to-date local development plans, despite the fact that that is a statutory duty. We are supportive of the Scottish Government's continuing efforts to rectify that situation and look forward to the results of the review that is under way.

**The Presiding Officer:** I need to ask you to wind up, Mr Stewart.

**Kevin Stewart:** There are many more aspects that I am sure colleagues will go into.

I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the framework.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the reports of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee (SP Paper 490), the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee (SP Paper 487), the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee (SP Paper 491) and the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee (SP Paper 492) on the Scottish Government document, *Ambition, Opportunity, Place: Scotland's Third National Planning Framework, Proposed Framework*, and the *Official Report* of the Parliament's debate on these reports, should form the Parliament's

response to the Scottish Government on the proposed framework.

14:26

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am pleased to contribute to this debate and to speak in support of Kevin Stewart's motion on behalf of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. My remarks come with the usual caveat that they represent the views of the committee and are not necessarily my own.

The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee welcomed the new approach of aligning scrutiny of the national planning framework and the review of Scottish planning policy, and we focused our scrutiny on a number of key energy issues that were addressed in both documents. I will concentrate my remarks on two key areas: the siting of onshore wind farms and proposals for onshore unconventional gas extraction.

Before I comment on the substance of the committee's report, I place on record my thanks to all those who gave evidence to the committee, my fellow committee members, the committee clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre researchers who assisted us.

First, I will deal with onshore wind farms. The committee considered the Scottish Government's proposal that the updated core areas of wild land map be used by planners in determining areas where onshore wind farms can be located, and the proposal to increase the buffer zone between wind farms and communities from 2km to 2.5km. It was clear from the evidence that we received that there is overwhelming support for the principle of protecting areas of wild land in Scotland and that what planners, developers and communities want is clarity on how that can be achieved. However, what was less clear was whether the map in its current form can achieve that.

Concerns were raised about the methodology that was used to create the map, which the minister described as

"a desk exercise ... informed by GIS data".—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 5 February 2014; c 3897.]

If development is not to be permitted in the areas that are identified as wild land, there is a concern about how that might impact on surrounding areas and whether the intention is for planners to take that into account in considering onshore wind farm applications.

A further consultation on the map was undertaken towards the end of last year. As the analysis had not been concluded during evidence taking, the minister was unable to give the committee the Government's final policy position.

The committee is of the view that, for the planning system to be effective, it needs to be transparent and policy needs to be applied consistently. We therefore recommended in our report that the Scottish Government state clearly in the final planning documents its policy position on the protection of wild land and provide clarity on the various issues that were raised in evidence. Given the level of interest in the matter, I hope that the minister will take the opportunity today to provide some clarity.

The second aspect that we looked at was the proposal to increase the separation distance between onshore wind farms and communities from 2km to 2.5km. We heard different evidence on that. Unsurprisingly, the energy sector wished to retain the existing separation, whereas those who were opposed to greater onshore wind development, including conservation groups, wished the distance to be increased.

Both sides agreed that there was confusion about how the policy would be applied, given that the planning documents do not contain definitions of a wind farm or a community. There was some confusion about whether a planning authority would retain any flexibility in siting onshore wind farms. For example, would a planning authority still be able to take into account local communities' views when considering applications?

In our report, we recommended that the final planning documents provide clarity on how the terms "wind farm" and "community" are to be interpreted and whether the separation distance is to be a fixed boundary. When the minister gave evidence, he explained that he had thought that setting a fixed boundary would provide "greater certainty", but acknowledged that it had not done so. He pointed out that the proposal did not take account of the individual characteristics of landscapes and local circumstances and that therefore he was considering the evidence before coming to a final view. The committee appreciates that the minister is reflecting on the evidence, but it would be helpful if he could clarify today the Scottish Government's final policy position on the separation distance to be applied.

The committee's second key issue was the Scottish Government's proposal in the main issues report and draft framework to consolidate and develop

"emerging opportunities to utilise onshore reserves of 'unconventional' gas".

As members are aware, that is perhaps one of the most controversial aspects of Scottish planning policy. It is a new area for developers, planners and communities.

What became clear to the committee during evidence taking was the lack of information

available, leading to a lack of understanding about the planning process, required levels of consultation and possible environmental impacts. Given the number of agencies involved in the licensing and monitoring of both unconventional gas extraction and hydraulic fracturing, the committee recommended that the final planning documents should outline the different roles and responsibilities of the various agencies. In particular, we asked the minister to consider whether the application processes for unconventional gas extraction and the use of hydraulic fracturing involve fully the communities where the extraction could take place, and we recommended that both processes should be subject to the same level of community consultation.

The issue of whether there should be a buffer zone between extraction sites and communities and, if so, what the distance should be, is yet another matter on which the Scottish Government's final policy position remains unknown. The issue divided the committee, with a majority at this stage agreeing not to set a fixed separation distance. I understand that the Government's expert scientific panel is considering the buffer zone proposal. Unfortunately, the minister was unable to confirm to the committee when the panel would report or when he would make a final decision on that key issue.

The lack of a clear policy position on a number of key energy issues was not only disappointing, but detrimental to the ability of the committee and stakeholders to scrutinise fully the proposed changes to planning policy. Therefore, the committee concluded that all consultative and research work should be concluded prior to any future draft national planning framework being laid and the 60-day scrutiny period commencing.

I have raised a number of key concerns that were identified in the committee's report. I hope that the minister will respond to some of those concerns because committee members were all agreed that it is important that we have greater clarity on those important matters.

14:33

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I welcome, this time on behalf of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the proposed national planning framework 3. I, too, thank those who provided written and oral evidence to the committee. I also thank my fellow committee members for their input.

The committee welcomes the Scottish Government's ambition to make Scotland a more successful country and recognises the role that the NPF plays in achieving that. The national developments that are outlined in NPF3 will spearhead progress in regeneration, energy, environment, transport, housing and digital connectivity.

I start with general comments on the NPF3 processes and document and some of the concerns that have been mentioned. Stakeholders raised questions about the timescale for the scrutiny of the NPF document. I will not labour the point, but for a document of such significance, the timescales allowed presented a serious challenge for stakeholders and committees to consider NPF3 in the depth that it deserved.

That is especially true when multiple documents are being considered in tandem as the NPF and the Scottish planning policy were on this occasion. It is a welcome and sensible step that scrutiny of the documents has been co-ordinated, given the linkages between them. The committee heard that stakeholders would welcome an extension of the approach to include other key documents that form the strategic planning and investment framework, such as the national transport strategy; "Low Carbon Scotland: Meeting our Emissions Reduction Targets 2013-2027: The Second Report on Proposals and Policies", or RPP2; and the infrastructure investment plan. Indeed, the IIP was itself the subject of an update and progress report, which was published yesterday. Would it not have been better for committees to have had access to that document to help inform their consideration of the draft NPF3?

The committee was of the view that there would be value in the Government making clear in the finalised NPF3—or associated documentation—the hierarchy of documents that form the framework, the role that each of the documents plays and how they impact upon one another. Such an approach may clarify why certain projects have been allocated national development status while others have not—in some cases, that may be because they are covered by another document elsewhere in the hierarchy.

The committee felt that better signposting to information that forms the background to NPF3 would benefit the finalised document. Although the scoring for the projects that are proposed for national development status is available on the Scottish Government's website, there is no mention in NPF3 of where the information can be accessed. The committee took the view that highlighting where that information can be accessed would improve transparency.

Again in the interest of transparency, the committee recommended that the finalised NPF3

and future NPF documents should provide information regarding the progress and outcomes of national development projects that are included in one iteration of the NPF but which do not appear in the following iteration. Such an approach might also assist in achieving better outcome measurement.

I turn specifically to transport, housing and digital infrastructure. Strategic airport enhancements were an area of some debate when the committee took evidence. The potential economic benefit that they may bring was discussed, but we also heard concerns about how the projected growth of air travel to Scotland might impact on emissions targets. The committee welcomed the potential for economic growth from those enhancements, but urged caution, as we are mindful of the scale of the emissions targets that are still to be met.

There was greater consensus regarding the importance of surface access systems. It was suggested in evidence to the committee that improved surface access and better connection between transport systems may reduce the need for domestic flights and, as such, help to meet emissions targets.

On rail developments, the committee heard concerns that the high-speed rail link from Edinburgh to Glasgow had been allocated national development status when a business case had not yet been produced. However, we understand that that is due shortly and we look forward to receiving details from the Minister for Transport and Veterans.

Stakeholders raised the specific issue of why rail freight was not included as a national development when three sea port projects are listed as national developments. The committee recommended that, in future iterations of the NPF, rail freight should be seriously considered for national development status. The Scottish Government acknowledged the importance of rail freight to Scotland's future in NPF3, and the committee highlighted freight's potential to make a real contribution towards meeting wider objectives in relation to enhanced connectivity and sustainability.

On active travel, the committee was pleased to note the inclusion of the national long-distance cycling and walking network in NPF3 and the Scottish Government's plans for the creation of active towns.

In its consideration of housing issues in NPF3, the committee found common ground with other committees in its concern at evidence that the majority of local authority housing development plans are more than five years old, contrary to legislative requirements. I lend the Infrastructure

and Capital Investment Committee's support in that regard and urge the Scottish Government to work with local authorities to ensure speedy resolution of the matter.

The committee noted that the broadband fibre network is rolling out on time and we look forward to access being future proofed.

I hope that the committee's recommendations are of use to the Scottish Government in strengthening NPF3 and making it a clear and transparent plan for Scotland's future. We look forward to hearing the minister's response.

14:40

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee in this debate on the Scottish Government's proposed national planning framework 3.

I was encouraged to quote Winston Churchill at this point, but I will instead quote the Minister for Local Government and Planning. When he came to our committee, he said:

"The planning system is sometimes about conflict and about balancing interests. It is a question of balancing the needs of the country and the needs of the local environment."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 19 February 2014; c 3296.]

That sums up well what we considered the issues to be. It effectively summarises our committee's belief that, in order to reduce our carbon emissions, adapt to changes in our climate and have a sustainable rural Scotland, we need to ensure that appropriate plans are in place now.

The committee believes that NPF3 has a fundamental role in delivering Scotland's greenhouse gas reduction targets, in helping our environment and communities to adapt to climate change and in ensuring the sustainability of our rural communities.

We agree with the evidence that we heard from stakeholders that NPF3 is indeed a positive and ambitious document, and we welcome the emphasis that it places on delivering a low carbon Scotland and meeting our climate change targets.

The committee also heard from stakeholders that NPF3 could be strengthened in places, and I will focus my comments on some of those, concentrating mainly on the ways in which we can meet our low carbon targets and on the protection and restoration of our peatlands.

As the Minister for Local Government and Planning will have seen from our report, we are calling for the tools that we already have at our disposal to be used to improve our decision-

making process for the benefit of the future, at all levels of Government.

We heard from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency about the spatial planning assessment of climate emissions—SPACE—tool, which was applied in the strategic environmental assessments for the national developments in NPF3. The SPACE tool can be used to estimate the likely carbon emissions related to building energy use, transport energy use, waste and land-use changes. It also enables the impact of the carbon emissions of different development scenarios to be assessed.

The committee recommends in its report that carbon assessments be carried out for all developments, as it believes that doing so will help us to respond to the challenging targets that are set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and in RPP2. We ask that a requirement for carbon assessments for all developments be reflected in the final NPF3.

On a similar point, the committee heard about how the carbon calculator tool is used to assess the impact of wind farm developments. It compares the carbon costs of building the wind farm with the carbon savings that are attributable to its running. The calculation is summarised as the length of time, in years—or months, maybe—that it will take for the carbon savings to amount to the carbon costs. That is referred to as the payback period, and it is vitally important in relation to our decisions about the value of proposals.

Currently, the carbon calculation is required only for wind farm developments with a capacity of 50MW or above. The committee recommends in its report that the carbon impact of every aspect of a wind farm, including the impacts of importation, transportation and the carbon payback period, be assessed for all wind farms, no matter their size.

As most members may know, our peatlands also make a significant contribution to carbon abatement and the meeting of our carbon emission reduction targets. Although we welcome the commitment in NPF3 to the restoration of peatlands, we believe that their protection is equally important.

Scottish Environment LINK told the committee:

"It is important not to single out wind farms ... Developments in other sectors cause damage to peatlands if they are in the wrong place, whether they are housing developments, supermarkets or ... opencast coal mining ... The carbon balance of a coal mine is slightly different from the carbon balance of an onshore wind farm".—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 29 January 2014; c 3220.]

That is why we support our stakeholders' call to require carbon assessments to be carried out for

all developments on peatlands, irrespective of what they are for, which we included as a recommendation in our report.

The committee also recommends that the detailed information on peat condition and depth that potential private developers gather and submit as part of the planning process be used to assist our understanding of peat. We welcomed the Minister for Environment and Climate Change's recognition that those detailed environmental assessments provide a useful opportunity for us to capture detailed information. In our future consideration of peatlands, the committee looks forward to hearing just how the Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage and other stakeholders will encourage the provision of that information and how they will use it to inform their knowledge and decisions.

Some stakeholders raised a concern that NPF3 refers specifically to the restoration of peatlands in the north and north-west of Scotland, and they are keen—as is the committee—to ensure that the relevance of peatlands anywhere in Scotland is recognised. We were glad to be reassured by the minister that the Scottish Government's commitment to peatland restoration applies not only in the north and north-west of the country but to peatlands throughout Scotland.

In conclusion, the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee welcomes NPF3 and has suggested ways in which the final document could be strengthened in relation to climate change and environmental matters. I am pleased to support Kevin Stewart's motion, and I look forward to the minister's response.

14:46

**The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Derek Mackay):** It is perhaps appropriate that 18 September 2012 was chosen as the date on which the preparation of Scotland's third national planning framework and the review of Scottish planning policy were announced. I have no doubt that, after 2014, 18 September will be remembered not as the day on which I made a planning announcement but as the day on which Scotland took control of its own destiny. The enormity of that decision will inevitably overshadow the importance of the 2012 announcement, but the decision to review those two crucial planning documents simultaneously for the first time is important, too. Members should make no mistake about it—although that decision was not quite as historic as a decision on Scotland's future, NPF3 and SPP are both important documents that will play a key role in shaping that future.

NPF3 is a spatial expression of the Government's economic strategy. It concerns our ambition to create great places that support sustainable economic growth throughout the country and to realise our opportunities for development and investment. It brings together our plans and strategies to provide a coherent vision for how Scotland as a place should evolve in the next 20 to 30 years.

The debate in Parliament on "Scotland's Third National Planning Framework: Main Issues Report and Draft Framework" in March last year supported our key themes and our vision of Scotland as a successful, sustainable, low-carbon, natural, resilient and connected place. The revised SPP also supports that vision and sets out our national priorities to guide future development and decisions so that the planning system delivers better places for people to visit and to live, work and invest in.

My decision to review both documents together for the first time was no accident. An integrated approach to considering where development should take place and how the planning system should operate has given people—and Parliament—the opportunity to consider and debate the overall role of planning and its contribution to Scotland's future.

Parliamentary scrutiny is the final stage of an open and transparent engagement process that has taken place throughout the preparation of NPF3 and SPP. The contributions have been invaluable, and I am particularly grateful to the four committees that took evidence on the documents. Many issues were raised at the committees, and they will be highlighted today.

The Local Government and Regeneration Committee focused on the overall role of NPF3 and its relationship with SPP and other Scottish Government policies. The committee's report emphasises the importance of planning and of making the links between those policies so that they work better together to create more successful and sustainable places.

The Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee discussed transport, housing and a suite of national development programmes, and its report highlights the need to continually review and develop the relationship between planning and investment in infrastructure to support growth, regeneration and investment.

The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee naturally focused on energy matters and covered issues that are relevant to both documents. There are many different views on the role of NPF3 in making Scotland a low carbon place, some of which we have covered today. I believe that the balanced nature of the committee's scrutiny has

moved us some way towards consensus on a number of challenging issues, including onshore wind and unconventional gas.

The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee had a wide-ranging discussion on the role of NPF3 in creating a sustainable rural Scotland and supporting the climate change agenda. I recognise the importance of those elements in underpinning the strategy and ensuring that NPF3 and SPP support economic growth that is truly sustainable.

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** The minister mentioned the importance of rural Scotland. I know that at least two committees considered the issue of wild land. Both NPF2 and the main issues report recognised the need for strong protection of our wildest landscapes. I think it would be fair to say that there was an expectation among many stakeholders that that would be recognised by the inclusion of SNH's wild land map in NPF3. By not including it, has the Government changed its mind on the issue's importance?

**Derek Mackay:** No, we have not changed our mind. I am looking forward to the full analysis of the SNH consultation, which can then inform SPP, which is a more appropriate place to locate decisions around grouping and the relevance of wild lands. An important point is that we did not propose a new designation. The issue relates specifically to wind turbines and is still under active consideration, under the evidence-based approach and methodology that I said I would use. To come back to Murdo Fraser's points, there are still matters on which I have to get further evidence and advice before I conclude Government policy.

I think it is better that I engage, consult and listen to the views of Parliament today before I finalise the Government's position, rather than finalising the Government's position first and ignoring Parliament.

To respond specifically to Alex Fergusson, we will come back to the issue. We have not changed our mind, but I am taking further evidence to ensure that the mapping exercise is robust and will sufficiently address the onshore wind issues that I intend it to address to get the balance right, not only by supporting our continuing to meet our targets but by achieving greater protection for the environment.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** I will pursue the matter of wild land. The minister said that the Government wanted to consult further. Does he recognise that the consultation has happened and that 73 per cent of respondents supported the mapping of wild land?

**Derek Mackay:** I recognise that there is polarised opinion on the approach to renewables. I intend to get the balance right between a continuing renewables strategy for Scotland that meets the most ambitious climate change targets in the world and greater protection for the environment, where that is appropriate. I hope that we will get the balance right. I will look very closely at the research that has been provided on that subject.

I turn to one or two other matters that Murdo Fraser mentioned—I hope to be able to return to some more of them in my summing-up. On issues such as the buffer zone, the expert panel and unconventional gas, we will require to take further time before we finalise our position. Given the nature of consultation in Parliament, I am sure that that is what any member would expect.

Each of the committees has agreed a number of recommendations, which I know will be discussed in the debate. Their interest in the issue and the quality of their discussions confirm the important relationship between NPF3 and this Government's purpose. I welcome the rigour with which Parliament has considered NPF3 and the review of SPP. In return, I assure members that we will consider their recommendations carefully.

To set the scene for the debate, I will highlight a number of key issues that have been discussed in the four committees.

First, unsurprisingly, questions were asked about the information that was used to inform decisions on the content of NPF3. Although the document itself is succinct, its content is based on two years of information gathering and analysis, going back to the launch in September 2012.

Much of the information is lengthy and complex, but we have made the process as transparent as possible by making background material available at each stage of the process, including all the accompanying assessments and detailed analysis of candidates for national development status.

The proposed NPF3 includes 14 national developments that will deliver the aims of the national spatial strategy. Many members have discussed national developments, mentioning those that we have included and those that we have not included.

There was also considerable interest in how we narrowed down 242 formal proposals to 14 proposed national developments. It is inevitable that many people want their proposal to be given national development status. I believe that the developments that we have proposed provide the best possible articulation of our overall spatial strategy. They also strike a positive balance between ambition and pragmatic delivery. I welcome the consensus that appears to have



emerged in the committee debates on the 14 proposed national developments.

Another common issue is the way in which NPF3 relates to other Scottish Government plans, programmes and strategies. NPF3 has been informed at every stage by existing and emerging policy and it plays a unique and valuable role in setting out what our policies mean for Scotland as a place. I hope that members agree that the role of a national planning framework is to bring together—not duplicate—those policies, that it must focus specifically on issues that have a clear spatial dimension, and that it benefits from that status.

Finally, the spatial strategy has clearly been uppermost in many members' minds. It is a strategy for all of Scotland that sets out nationally important themes and shows how those themes will play out differently in our cities, towns, villages and countryside. Of course, some parts of Scotland can expect large-scale development, whereas in other places smaller-scale, locally led change will emerge, but I am confident that the strategy is relevant to all parts of Scotland.

The planning system is not often accused of being ahead of the game, but a yes vote on 18 September will finally enable Scotland to take advantage of its devolved land-use planning system. Both NPF3 and SPP will make a significant contribution to the Government's agenda and ambitions to make Scotland a more successful country, and they will support sustainable economic development and the move to a low-carbon economy.

Many decisions that are central to those ambitions will be guided by the planning system: decisions about supporting the development needs of our growth sectors; investment decisions to ensure that transport, housing, energy and digital infrastructure meets the needs of our people; and decisions about how best to protect and value the many physical aspects, both natural and cultural, that make Scotland such a special place. Some of those decisions will be widely supported and others will inevitably generate conflicting views, which is why a planning system that provides clarity and confidence to developers and communities is vitally important to Scotland.

Together NPF3 and SPP will provide a clear national vision of what is expected of the planning system and the outcomes that it must deliver for the people of Scotland. I welcome again the consensus around the national developments and the on-going support for NPF3. I will deliver on the requests for clarity on the potential around the proposals.

I believe that a better process can be delivered. We have learned from NPF2, and in NPF3—the

next iteration—the process can be enhanced by many of the committees' suggestions. We have benefited from reviewing NPF3 and SPP simultaneously, which has given SPP the parliamentary exposure it deserves. I will listen to the committees' recommendations and respond in due course.

The implementation date for NPF3 and SPP is June 2014. The 60-day period that members have referred to was set by the Parliament in a previous session, in the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006. It would be wrong to suggest that the process has only taken 60 days—there was a big run-in in the NPF3 process—but the 60-day parliamentary scrutiny period is invaluable and we will consider how we can enhance things, taking on board the committees' recommendations.

The action plan, the monitoring arrangements and the wider planning action plan will ensure that we deliver. We are working with all stakeholders to ensure that planning delivers, and we are capturing the concerns that have been raised about the fact that so many local development plans are behind and out of date.

This is about policy principles and a plan, a vision and an ambition for Scotland, and it is about giving clarity. As we move towards the end of the process, I hope that, with the consensus that we have reached, we can deliver those things for Scotland and, in turn, deliver sustainable economic growth. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

14:58

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I will ignore the beginning and some of the end of the planning minister's speech, because it was a one-size-fits-all speech for every occasion that he has to speak at, and I will focus on the core comments about NPF3 and SPP. In the time that I have available, I will reflect on three key areas: process and timing issues; the issues that have not been given sufficient weighting in, or have been omitted from, the final document; and areas on which it is absolutely clear from the committees' recommendations that more work is required.

It has been a common theme from the committees that the process has not been good enough this time around. Some very sensible suggestions have been made that would improve scrutiny and transparency in the process, and improve the document's outcomes. Parliament's committees have carried out a substantial amount of work and have made significant efforts to enable witnesses and consultees to contribute to the process.

However, it is clear from the recommendations of the committees that the Scottish Government's

process has not to date been sufficiently robust. The work has not been completed and there are far too many loose ends for this stage in the process.

The four committees completed a great deal of work on parliamentary scrutiny, and on Friday published their recommendations and conclusions. I am concerned that there has not been enough time for MSPs to reflect on the committees' recommendations. Part of the test is to join the dots between the committees.

The issue is not just our capacity as MSPs to respond to recommendations, but that we are having a debate when the minister and his civil servants also have not had much time to consider the recommendations. The minister will have seen the recommendations only on Friday—I presume that he has been tied to his desk looking at his computer, and his civil servants likewise. We have had only Friday and Monday to stand back and reflect on the issues—an incredibly short time. It is not only the detail that has got to be right—the high-level thinking has got to be right, too, and it should cut right across Government. The four committees have done their job of evaluating NPF3 and the SPP from the perspective of their policy responsibilities.

A weakness that was identified by all the committees was lack of co-ordination in ensuring that the key issues were analysed and consulted on effectively. The Local Government and Regeneration Committee was right to recommend the need for a more co-ordinated and effective consultation process. The Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee correctly commented on the problems of timescale for consultees in the consultation on the NPF. A reasonable request for clarity on progress in implementation of projects that were identified in previous NPFs was made to the Scottish Government; I hope that the planning minister will reflect on and agree to that request.

One of the main objectives of the NPF process is to enable identification of nationally significant projects that are not short term, which will be followed up by Government agencies in terms of investment priorities and which give private sector interests a clear steer on priorities for the next two to three decades. That means that inclusion of projects needs to be transparent and that there must be clarity about the criteria that are used to select projects. That is important in the case of the winners, so that people understand why those projects are key priorities. However, it is also important that people understand why certain projects have not been selected, because it leaves a challenge at regional and local levels in respect of how those projects might be progressed.

A number of key issues were not given sufficient weighting in, or were omitted from, the final document. I have had representations from a variety of interests which—irrespective of whether they agreed with them—cannot see what has happened to some issues. The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee rightly highlighted what is, in effect, confusion about the lack of clarity on the importance of sustainable development. It is an issue that should be on the faces of the NPF and the SPP because it provides the context for the where and the how of the planning system.

The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee also highlighted the lack of a connection to the RPP. That is a significant omission, given the Government's climate change commitments. NPF3 is probably the most important national document for setting the route map for investment decisions over the next 30 years, which is the period in which we have got to get it right on climate change. The NPF needs to bring everything together. It is clear from the committees' recommendations that more work needs to be done if we are going to achieve the low-carbon world to which we all aspire.

I will conclude on areas that the committees highlighted as requiring more work in order to strengthen the documents. It is worrying that there are several big-ticket issues on which more work is clearly required before the documents can be approved.

Our airports have been mentioned. Airports are crucial to our future development, but a low-carbon transport strategy needs to be embedded in a credible plan for accessible transport to Glasgow airport. We are promised something soon, but it will not be in time for us to scrutinise the proposals. The coverage of energy also leaves many questions unanswered.

I return to my initial concerns. There are simply too many instances of organisations and consultees rightly asking questions about the lack of robustness of the proposals and policies that we are discussing today, and the minister has overstated the consensus that has been achieved.

Last year, during the run up to this process, concerns were raised about cumulative development between communities, along with worries about the priority that is attached to protecting key landscapes, and the need for clarity for the renewables industry. When we look at what is left in the documents, the handling of the wild land issue is a bit of a dog's breakfast. It clearly satisfies none of the key stakeholders who have expressed views to members of all parties. What is the basis for identification of wild land? What is its status? How is it meant to guide decisions on development? None of that is clear. The Rural

Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee has recommended that the wild land map not be put in the NPF so that it can be flexible, and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee is concerned about the lack of clarity for communities and developers.

We need to know how those things will join up and we need to know the answers. The Scottish Government urgently needs to take on board the concerns that have been raised by the committees and the consultees so that everyone has clarity to underpin the decisions that local authorities are expected to make. That is not so that we can all be happy, or so that everyone can agree because—as the minister has already commented—that is probably not possible. However, we need clarity so that people know where they are.

For example, on the 2km or 2.5km separation distance proposal, research is being carried out, but it is not available to us today. It will be concluded and its findings will shape the final SPP without Parliament's having had the chance to test or question it. We in the Labour Party are particularly concerned about the lack of clarity in respect of community renewables.

There is also the issue of the proposed handling of fracking and unconventional gas extraction. This is by no means the first time that we have debated these issues, but we still feel as if we are far from a coherent, precautionary and clear approach for communities. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee recommendations on clarity for communities about the process and on safeguarding their capacity to be properly consulted are really important, as are the recommendations on proper consideration of the social, health, and environmental impact on communities of developments. The committee has commented that the expert information should be available from the Scottish Government before the process concludes, and that there should be transparency. The major weaknesses that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee identified need to be addressed urgently.

I did not expect to spend so much time on process issues when I was preparing for today's debate, but when we look across what all the committees said, it is really striking. It challenges the planning minister on how he reports back to Parliament and on where scrutiny begins and ends. That is important not only for members who are doing their job, but for consultees, who rightly expect to know in the end how their comments have been processed. The minister has to do more on that.

15:07

**Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con):** I am pleased to contribute to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's debate on NPF3.

Parliamentary scrutiny of NPF3 and the Scottish planning policy was the first issue to be considered—in particular the adequacy of the 60-day statutory scrutiny period. In his evidence, the minister drew attention to the consultation process, including publication of the main issues report, and we accepted that a good deal of work had been done before the draft NPF3 was published in January. However, it is worth noting the evidence of the John Muir Trust, which highlighted the significant changes from the main issues report, including the list of national developments that was revealed in January. The opportunity for scrutiny of such significant changes within the statutory 60-day scrutiny period is limited and, as such, it invites suspicion—whatever the minister says—and cynicism when the Government pulls such fast changes out of the hat so near the end of the process.

That is certainly the case with the wild land issue. Although I note the minister has pointed to its inclusion in the SPP, I cannot help but think that its inclusion in one document but not in the other is nonsensical, and not at all persuasive, as my colleague Alex Fergusson and others have pointed out. If no better reason to justify its omission is forthcoming, the minister should recognise our wild land in the final NPF3. That is crucial.

Another issue that was raised about future scrutiny was whether the NPF and the Scottish planning policy should remain separate documents or whether there should be one overall planning document. I welcome the minister's innovation in issuing the documents together and—as did many of those who gave evidence—I recognise the benefit of that. Although there were some arguments in favour of having one combined plan, I am still to be persuaded of the merits of that, and I note the minister's view that they address two separate, albeit linked, issues.

The contributions on that aspect at committee bring me on to some of the broader challenges that face the planning system. I think that there is agreement that one of the main problems that we face is the question how to encourage greater engagement with, and understanding of, our planning system, which was a recurring theme in much of the evidence that we received. There was a great deal of discussion about members of the public not understanding the complexities of the planning system. As a new MSP and someone who was previously unfamiliar with planning, I often felt their pain—sometimes literally.

As the committee report states, the general public often first become interested in and involved with the planning process when a planning decision impacts on their immediate environment. I was therefore pleased that there was discussion of the language that is sometimes used when discussing planning. For instance, the discussions of NPF3 being the what and Scottish planning policy being the how had the feeling of being almost abstract. I was grateful for the input of the likes of Petra Biberbach of Planning Aid for Scotland, who noted that esoteric language can be a barrier. I realise that the issue is complex and that we should not oversimplify it, but by the same token we should bear in mind our duty to make the planning system accessible. If that means occasionally translating our discussions into even plainer English, so much the better.

The review of strategic plans and local development plans and how they relate to each other is also welcome and is central to public engagement. I am sure that others will note the lack of up-to-date local development plans, which is a serious concern. However, even when such plans are in place, confusion about their operation and development has, in my experience, compounded uncertainty and disenchantment with the planning system overall. As I said, and as the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's report stated, most people's view of the system is influenced by local developments. Put more simply, they will look at new buildings—for example, housing—in their area and will want to know how and why they have come to be. Our objective should be that people should at least, whether or not they agree with decisions, understand the process.

In that context, I note the evidence to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee on housing targets, which is an important issue to communities that are fighting for the green belt, particularly in my Lothian region where, in south-west Edinburgh, east Edinburgh and Midlothian there is a real threat to the green belt, which is somewhat under siege. Robin Holder and Neil Collar suggested that the present system of strategic plans that set general targets leads to delays in setting specific numbers. The opaque nature of the strategic plan targets is a real problem, for reasons that have been outlined, and because the vague system for calculating housing need makes it difficult for the public and community councils to hold anyone to account.

We are not lacking in elected politicians in Scotland, but we need far greater accountability—whether at national level in Parliament or at local level—on our housing needs assessments. Indeed, if I was a cynical man, I might suggest that the complexity of the present system is a convenient smokescreen for some to avoid taking

responsibility for housing targets, and that it slightly undermines public understanding.

My committee colleague John Wilson raised with the minister the issue of deviations from local or strategic plans, and I was most interested in the minister's reply. He stated that, where there are material considerations, such as economic benefit, it would be possible to depart from a plan. That, too, is at the core of the public understanding of the process. If a community contributes to a local plan and works hard to shape it, but finds that the plan is disregarded at a later stage when an application that is contrary to it is approved, that has serious implications for the community's faith in what is, after all, meant to be a plan-led system. There have been a number of such examples. Accordingly, I would welcome further comments from the minister on that.

I look forward to the Government's responses to the points that I have raised and to other points that have been raised during the process.

15:13

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** I thank the clerks to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, and all the other committees that contributed, for their work in producing the committee reports, which have been outlined by the committee conveners.

I welcome the fact that the NPF3 and SPP documents have been consulted on at the same time. I note the 14 national developments, which cover the nation from north to south and from east to west, which demonstrates the level of ambition in the Scottish Government. In my area, there is the proposed Aberdeen Harbour Board development in Nigg bay. That is not in my constituency, but as the two constituency members who are affected by it have both spoken as conveners, I hope that they will not mind me sticking my oar in, so to speak. The proposal offers an exciting opportunity for the city of Aberdeen.

The potential to develop at Nigg a deep-water facility would support the oil and gas sector and the burgeoning investment in the renewable energy sector. It would also support the tourism sector because of the potential to attract cruise ships to the city of Aberdeen, which is currently prohibited because of lack of capacity in the harbour.

That development underpins the Scottish Government's intention to ensure that planning assists in driving economic development. The harbour proposals would be a significant boost to the economy in the north-east of Scotland and the Scottish economy. Indeed, although the other 13 national developments are underpinned by a need

to boost economic development in the communities and regions where they will be located, they will have a national ripple effect, and some of them—for example, roll-out of broadband—are, in essence, national projects.

To have consulted on SPP at the same time was the correct approach. The minister outlined that that means the where and how being consulted on at the same time. It has allowed for the link to be made and has allowed for the connections that exist between the two documents. At the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, we took evidence on whether the two documents should be combined. The minister made a good case for keeping them separate, but the linkage that exists between them was highlighted by their being consulted on together.

The committee also discussed what lies beyond NPF3 and SPP in the hierarchy of planning. The point was made numerous times at committee and by the convener in his opening speech that it is vital to ensure that local development plans and strategic plans are developed timeously and are up to date because, as many members have highlighted, they are often the gateway to the planning system for communities, and ensuring that a local development plan is up to date is key to ensuring that NPF3's strategic objectives are delivered.

I note that, when that matter was raised at the committee with Malcolm MacLeod of Heads of Planning Scotland, he said:

"We are looking at things such as gateway reviews; we have other local authorities coming in and looking at experience elsewhere and at what particular authorities are doing, to see whether that can be improved. That should be of benefit."

He also mentioned that

"speed in preparing development plans is key to getting people involved. If things drag out over a long period, people lose interest or it goes off the radar."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Regeneration Committee*, 5 February 2014; c 3096.]

That point is about community involvement in the planning process and keeping communities involved for as long as possible.

The Local Government and Regeneration Committee has put firmly on the radar its concerns about the effectiveness of local authorities in getting in place their local development plans within the statutory period. I am sure that that will be examined closely and, probably, returned to in the future.

How planning is done and how its delivery has evolved were emphasised. We heard at our evidence-taking sessions about use of the charrette system as a means of involving the wider

public. Often, public involvement in the planning process comes through community councils. At the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, we heard evidence that a community council is not necessarily representative of the community's views. Often, they are self-selecting and are full of people who have joined the community council to say no to a planning application. That is not always the case, but it often is.

The charrette system has allowed involvement in the planning process to be opened up to a much broader spectrum of the community. Indeed, Petra Biberbach of Planning Aid for Scotland and Pam Ewen of TAYplan highlighted the point that engagement is the key. However, a mindset issue still exists; we need to ensure that those who make the decisions on local development plans and planning in general have a much greater understanding of how plans about developing a community must also be about a sense of community and placemaking, rather than just about throwing up housing without wider consideration of what needs to go with it. If we can get that mindset shift alongside the strategic documents that are being put in place, we will have a much stronger planning system.

15:20

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate on both of these draft planning documents as shadow minister for environment and climate change and as a member of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, and I endorse the remarks of our convener, Rob Gibson, on our report.

Planning underpins our way forward. As the documents that set out Scotland's national spatial planning strategy—I emphasise the word "spatial", as did the minister in committee—they will be of profound significance, but as Sarah Boyack highlighted, the end of the process has been truncated, and some of the decision making about what has been included and what has not is somewhat opaque.

Sustainable development must underpin our planning and, indeed, our economic direction, so I was reassured to hear the minister, Derek Mackay, say in evidence to our committee:

"Sustainable development and sustainable economic growth absolutely underpin everything in the document. We believe that we can deliver greater growth while protecting the environment. It is about balance."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 19 February 2014; c 3282.]

In its report, the committee said:

“The Committee notes the concerns of stakeholders regarding the prominence of sustainable economic growth in the NPF3. The Committee considers that sustainable development, as defined by Brundtland, and the shared UK principles for sustainable development, should underpin the NPF3 and be reflected on the face of the document and the Committee welcomes the Minister’s comments clarifying the significance of sustainable development underpinning the document.”

I would appreciate the minister commenting on that in his closing remarks.

NPF3 connects with all policies and, although I understand the minister’s argument that not all policies can be referenced in what is a spatial document, policies such as zero waste should be. The problem is one of time. I appreciate that that is a complexity, but the national marine plan, for example, is not even in place yet. I would like the minister to tell us how those issues can be taken into account before a review is held in some years’ time.

The Scottish Government must ensure that funding and partners are in place to ensure that appropriate development can happen. Renewable heat and district heating projects are a key example of such development. Flooding is another area in which funding and partnerships are essential. I would have liked the NPF to have contained a bit more about partnership working.

I agree with our committee, which

“shares the concerns of stakeholders in relation to the removal of the statement that the NPF3 will help deliver the package of proposals and policies outlined in the RPP2. The Committee recommends that this is included in the final draft of the NPF3.”

I urge the minister to consider reinstating that. Although I strongly support the mainstreaming of climate change, the context must be clearly stated.

In the view of Friends of the Earth Scotland,

“SPP does not reflect the urgency of the need to decarbonise throughout the subject sections. The planning system must aim to reduce the need to travel in the first place, promote energy efficient buildings, and prioritise protection and enhancement of key habitats both in relation to mitigation and adaptation.”

NPF3 is also of profound significance in setting the strategic development that should take place as part of Scotland’s national developments. Some stakeholders are concerned—and I agree with them—that national developments are conflicting given the move towards a low-carbon economy. Although the minister said that, overall, there is balance, I am still concerned about some of the projects in the scheme and how they contribute to the move towards a low-carbon economy.

As our committee highlighted, it is disappointing that the national ecological network, which builds on the central Scotland green network, is missing

from the list of national priorities, despite the fact that it was included in NPF2 as an aspiration. Biodiversity and access to the countryside must surely be at the heart of NPF3. However, as co-convenor of the cross-party group on cycling, I am delighted that the national cycle network has been included. That sends a clear message to urban and rural communities—and, indeed, to local authorities—that cycling matters.

I was pleased with the emphasis in the NPF document on low-carbon, sustainable and connected places. I agree with the Scottish Wildlife Trust that

“Creating places where people want to live and do business”

is essential. If that is to be the case, environmental justice must be at the heart of our national planning framework for the future. We all have an obligation to ensure that the present challenges faced by communities who live near unrestored opencast sites are properly addressed and that consultation on future regulations ensures that there are no repeats of that.

In relation to fracking, Scottish Labour supports the removal of a presumption in favour of coal-bed methane extraction in the SPP and acknowledges that that industry could potentially create further challenges in meeting our climate change targets if unconventional gas is extracted as an additional fuel rather than to replace existing carbon-based energy. We will look carefully at future reports. In relation to distances from proposed developments, Scottish Labour supports the implementation of a 2km buffer zone between communities and any drilling. We would also like consultation on whether minimum distances should include water protected areas.

Planning must set the context for developing places in rural Scotland for people to live where housing is affordable and warm, where there are green spaces to relax and grow some of our own food, where food supply chains are shorter and where we can get a mobile signal. I hope that the minister will consider those issues for rural housing and planning in his closing remarks.

15:26

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I am very pleased to use my local constituency as a window on to this important Government proposal. Top of my list must be energy and the impact of proposal 3, which relates to carbon capture and storage.

Peterhead, which is referred to as Boddam on page 51 of the NPF document, can make three significant contributions to Scotland and beyond. First, as an intermediate technology, carbon capture and storage can assist in addressing

climate change until we are 100 per cent renewable in all forms of energy. Secondly, carbon capture and storage can create jobs. If we set the pace on carbon dioxide capture from gas production, our expertise becomes saleable and more well-paid jobs are a result. Finally, pumping the resulting carbonic acid into quasi-derelict oilfields creates value that is perhaps similar to or greater than the actual cost of investment in carbon capture. Oil will remain a vital chemical feedstock even as we eliminate it as an energy source. It will remain of very substantial value.

The harbours in my constituency are mentioned in the national planning framework: Peterhead, Fraserburgh and Buckie. They form part of the plan in relation to offshore renewable energy and each has its own individual but significant opportunities to contribute to mitigating climate change and to job creation. In addition, supporting the harbours will lead to the creation of a broader infrastructure that will be of value beyond those issues.

I differ from some previous contributors to the debate because I think that the national planning framework, which focuses on projects and practice, and the Scottish planning policy, which focuses on policy, work to different timelines and that there would be dangers in merging them into a single document. The SPP evolves relatively slowly to give planning certainty; the national planning framework responds to more short-term issues and opportunities. We must not allow them to become disconnected, because that would be very dangerous indeed. When we produce a national planning framework, we should revisit the Scottish planning policy to make sure that they are properly aligned.

We should remind ourselves that projects have three attributes: a beginning, a middle and an end, and that the end is the most important part of a project because that is when the benefits are delivered. However, policies have a beginning and then endure over the long term, with no determinate end, so they are rather different things.

I very much welcome a relook at separation standards for onshore wind. It is time that my local council in Aberdeenshire looked at its own standards, which are a little bit different from those of neighbouring councils. That creates pressures not only on the council, from a planning point of view, but on some of the communities in Aberdeenshire.

I also welcome the reference in the document to regeneration in Peterhead and Fraserburgh. That is important.

However, I depart from the approach that the document takes in being anchored in city regions.

I am not a great fan of cities. The culture of the north-east does not live in the city; it lives in rural areas and filters reluctantly into the city.

Broadband is an area in which we can create advantage for rural areas where there is, as yet, a great deal of unrealised potential, although the current plans for broadband may deliver less than we hope for. Investment is planned to go where the line speed is under 2 Mbps, but line speed does not really matter. We could build a railway line with a 100mph speed limit on it, but if we put too many trains on it, they will be able to run at only 20mph. The same is true of broadband—it is the throughput on lines that matters. I have a line speed of over 2 Mbps at home but I rarely cross 250 Kbps throughput. In fact, my terminal at the Parliament is 250 times faster than my terminal at home; yet, my line at home is not on the schedule for upgrade. We should look at that matter. The point is made on page 39 of the NPF.

The NPF says that regional transport partnerships have a crucial role to play. We must have good connections across Scotland—that is certainly true. In the north-east, my local regional transport partnership, Nestrans—which Alison McInnes was a very effective chair of, if I recall correctly—is worth keeping. However, the verdict on the rest of them is, at best, not proven. It is time that we had a look at what they really contribute.

Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce commends the Scottish Government for its

“ambition to use planning system to drive economic growth across Scotland”.

Others will welcome the document. I very much welcome the wide-ranging debate and look forward to seeing the NPF in its final form when it arrives in due course.

15:32

**Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):** I add my thanks to the four committees for the commentary that they have provided on their scrutiny of the third national planning framework draft document. The framework lays the foundations on which we can protect and enhance the quality of our natural and built environments. It is an opportunity to highlight key national priorities and to define how planning can contribute to securing sustainable economic growth. It also informs private and public investment decisions.

In my region, the draft framework recognises a number of projects of national importance that will foster growth and boost both the local and national economies. For example, the Dundee waterfront development has the potential to be truly transformational. Carbon capture and storage at Peterhead would be a world first for a gas-fired

power station and would cement Scotland's—and, indeed, the UK's—place as a leader in that technology. If built, the refurbishment would capture more than 85 per cent of the site's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions—1 million tonnes a year—and would deliver clean electricity to more than 500,000 homes as well as contribute to our meeting our emissions targets while retaining fossil fuels as part of a diversity of low-carbon energy sources. With the UK Government providing up to £1 billion in support, we are making real progress towards establishing that new industry, creating thousands of green jobs and heralding a new, sustainable future for engineering in the North Sea.

When I talk to residents and companies throughout the north-east—businesses that operate locally and those with global reach—their message is always clear and consistent: the north-east needs and deserves better infrastructure. They invariably agree that we have not got our fair share of that in recent years. Since 2005, the Scottish Government has spent £2 billion on completing road and rail projects across the country.

Just 0.5 per cent of that has been spent in the north-east, although the region is the powerhouse of Scotland's economy.

Key to sustaining the north-east's position as a dynamic regional economy of national importance is delivering on high-quality transport links. Nestrans, Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeen city and shire economic future—ACSEF—and Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce all agree on that and submitted evidence during the process. The Scottish National Party Government has so far failed to realise that position.

The oil and gas sector employs 45,000 people in the north-east, but activity in the region also supports many of the 400,000 jobs in the sector elsewhere around the UK. Supply-chain businesses export billions of pounds' worth of goods to countries around the world, and the region must be able to continue to attract the talent and investment that put it second only to central London in the UK on gross value added per person.

That is why I will use my remaining time to highlight why the draft framework must be amended to designate improvements to the east coast main line between Edinburgh and Aberdeen as a national priority. The framework acknowledges the contribution that the international airport and the harbour in Aberdeen can make to improving connectivity with the rest of the UK and international markets, but it is silent on the need to bring our rail services into the 21st century, although doing that will become all the

more important as high speed 2 leaves the region more peripheral.

It is therefore all the more surprising that the only rail project of national significance in the draft third national planning framework is an as yet uncosted and unproven high-speed line between Edinburgh and Glasgow. The passenger growth rate on many north-east journeys has far outstripped the Scottish average, but that appetite has not been reflected in the quality and range of services. Our rail options pale in comparison with those that are available in the central belt.

**Derek Mackay:** I appreciate the way in which Alison McInnes is raising issues and arguing passionately for her area, but does she recognise that she runs the risk of debating general rail infrastructure in relation to the national planning framework, which has specific functions and might not be relevant to the pitch that she is making? That is why there is a difference between what she has identified and what she seeks.

**Alison McInnes:** I hear what the minister says and I listened to his opening speech, when he said that

“NPF3 is a spatial expression of the Government's economic strategy.”

It is an odd economic strategy that is blind to the needs of the dynamic north-east region.

There is still a section of single track on the line to Aberdeen. Meanwhile, the Government has put £750 million into improving services between Edinburgh and Glasgow. In the absence of a business case and details of the likely exceptional costs, it strikes me as premature at best to prioritise a fifth line between those two cities over tackling Victorian intercity journey times. It would be of national significance to ensure that those who live and work in the north-east have modern and fast rail connections to our capital cities of Edinburgh and London.

The framework acknowledges that, over the next two decades, the projected 35 per cent growth in the number of households in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire will be among the highest rates in the country. However,

“neither the scale nor the implications of such growth are highlighted or addressed.”

Those are not my words but those of Nestrans, Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council in their written evidence to the committees.

To stimulate and nurture further economic success and facilitate the burgeoning population, transport links must support the region better. Scottish Liberal Democrats therefore believe that improving the main line to Aberdeen is worthy of national development status.



The title of NPF3 refers to “Ambition, Opportunity, Place”. We must be ambitious for all of Scotland and not just the central belt. I urge ministers to amend the framework accordingly and to ensure that the north-east is also a connected place.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

The debate is unusual for its lack of interventions, apart from the minister’s recent intervention. A modest amount of time—it is modest—is available for interventions should members wish to make or take them.

15:39

**Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP):** As a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, I am pleased to take part in the debate. I welcome the NPF3 and SPP documents and the debate that is taking place.

I aim to focus my comments on the role of planning and the public’s engagement with it. I will also briefly cover the role of planning authorities.

As we know, planning is an important subject that cannot be dismissed lightly. Planning creates the foundation for Scotland’s future and provides us with an outline of how our country can develop. It can promote types of development that we deem to be necessary to our economy while acting as a limit or barrier to unwelcome developments that can impact on our communities.

I certainly cannot stress enough that planning is a driver for economic growth, sustainability and jobs. As we know, Scotland already has the highest level of economic output per head in the UK, excluding London and the south-east. The planning process and the NPF3 and SPP documents should build on that, and I believe that they will.

Paragraph 24 of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee’s report sums up that point:

“Planning is one of the clearest examples of where the often opaque and impersonal process of making difficult decisions for the needs of society at large comes face-to-face with peoples’ everyday individual and family lives in the places where they live.”

I do not think that anyone can disagree with that or say that planning is boring and has nothing at all to do with them.

One of the key issues is ensuring that the public are engaged and realise that they have a role in planning. Too often, the public feel that planning is something that happens to them, not with them; that they cannot get involved in the system; and that they have no ownership in the system. Developers have the ability to turn to planning experts for guidance, whereas the public in

general do not have that ability. They do not have the resources, the time or even the knowledge of how to engage with the planning system.

That issue was addressed in paragraphs 105 to 108 of our report. We looked at the various options for engaging with the public. That involves having to strip away the jargon and communicating in easily understandable terms.

One suggestion was to introduce planning in the school education system—in geography, for instance. Another example was the use of charrettes, or even the charretteplus model that Planning Aid Scotland has developed, which, as the report says,

“builds on the traditional charrette process and ‘its ability to empower people by placing them firmly at the centre of the decision making’ about development plans for the community they live in”.

The Scottish Government should certainly be looking at that issue, which is one of the issues that we highlighted in our report. It should seek to assess the effectiveness of the various public engagement models with a view to developing a more co-ordinated strategy across all the public and private stakeholders. We touched on that in paragraph 113 of our report.

On the consultation, there was a concern about the 60-day limit for parliamentary committees to review NPF3. In its report, the Local Government and Regeneration Committee concluded that we encourage the Scottish Government

“to be mindful of the fact that multiple committees of the Parliament may wish to scrutinise draft NPFs and this should be factored into their planning in terms of the timescales for the development”

of future NPFs.

However, there was much praise for the Scottish Government’s approach in the development of NPF3 and how that has set a consultation benchmark. Heads of Planning Scotland’s response was that that was “a real step forward”. That is certainly to be welcomed, and I am sure that the approach will be developed further for future consultations.

I turn to the role of local planning authorities. Any successful planning system relies on every part of the system to fulfil its role. The delivery of an effective national planning system requires all levels to participate and operate in a supportive and complementary fashion. That means that, while the Scottish Government can draw up the NPF3 and the Scottish planning policy, there is still a responsibility on planning authorities to draw up their local development plans and strategic development plans.

The committee was concerned that, nearly a decade since the Parliament enacted legislative

reform of the planning system, a number of planning authorities in Scotland are currently in violation of their statutory duty to have an up-to-date local development plan. How can the public have confidence in the planning system when some of the planning authorities are failing to engage fully with their commitments?

**Kevin Stewart:** Does Mr McMillan agree that the fact that certain authorities do not have up-to-date local plans often leads to planning by appeal, which is something that frustrates members of the public more than anything else?

**Stuart McMillan:** I agree, and we have certainly heard evidence about that not only in the particular work that we are discussing but in other pieces of work that the committee has undertaken over the past year or so.

When looking at planning authorities' role, it is also worth examining the issue of finance. The Scottish Government increased planning fees by 20 per cent, but the Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland expressed concerns that the additional fees are not invested in the planning service. Another witness who also supported that position claimed that there were huge variations between local authorities with regard to how they fund their planning functions. The concern is that, while simply increasing planning fees might mean more money to local authorities, there is no particular requirement for those fees to link to planning service improvements. Despite that, other evidence to the committee said that the increase was not only welcomed but invested in planning authorities.

The evidence from Heads of Planning Scotland also revealed that work is being undertaken to measure the cost of the planning system in order to contribute to the on-going debate on how the level of fees in the system supports local authorities' planning functions. In paragraph 128 of the report, the committee recommends that

"HOPS/COSLA, and the Scottish Government, seek to extend the approach across all 32 local authorities. This could provide a valuable tool in assessing any future increases in the level of the planning fee required to adequately resource the system."

There is far more detail in all the committee reports than anyone could hope to cover in six minutes or so. I aimed to highlight just a few key points, and I hope that we can open up the discussion further on planning to allow others to contribute to the debate.

15:46

**Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab):** I very much agree with the general principles set out in NPF3. Indeed, I think that we can all sign up to taking a longer-term view of putting in place the

infrastructure and the resources to deliver a healthy and vibrant economy that meets the economic and social needs of the people of Scotland.

It is also crucial that communities across Scotland can and do play their part in shaping the future strategic direction of development and that the areas for investment and development are prioritised at a local level. That is why full community engagement in the follow-up work—which in my constituency would be through the SESplan and Fifeplan local development plans—is absolutely crucial.

I also very much support the city region agenda and I recognise that cities can drive the wider economy but, for that to work, there must be wider infrastructure investment across the whole region. I suggest that in the case of Fife—I will focus on Fife in my speech—there is a failure to recognise the need for investment in the transport infrastructure.

The policy document highlights the potential for major development in what it calls the Fife energy corridor that stretches from Methil to Longannet. However, without investment in transport infrastructure, I am not sure whether that potential would be achieved. A major upgrade of the A92 in and around Glenrothes with better linkages with north Fife and beyond, the Redhouse roundabout upgrade at Kirkcaldy, the Levenmouth rail link and a direct rail link into Rosyth docks are all strategic projects that need to be recognised and identified as key drivers in the Fife economy.

I also make the point that, as a supporter of the city region agenda, I recognise that it may not always be possible for everyone to have a job on their doorstep. However, if the transport infrastructure and the public transport are not in place, people do not have the means to get to the jobs and will be left behind.

Another example in my constituency is the newly built and opened park-and-ride facility, Halbeath park and choose, where the only choice is the bus. The railway line to and from Edinburgh runs alongside the massive car park, but there is no rail halt and no option to get on the passing trains.

I have today lodged a motion in the Parliament that I hope will get cross-party support. The motion calls on the Scottish Government to introduce proposals for working in partnership with Network Rail and Fife Council to build on the success of the park-and-ride project and to put in place a rail halt and station at the site. That would be good for the Fife and Scottish economies and for the people of Fife, because they would be able to access a wider labour market. Indeed, it should be seen as a strategic priority for Fife.

I also make reference to the passage in the framework on land-based renewables that states:

“Local and community ownership and small-scale generation can have a lasting impact on rural Scotland, building business and community resilience and providing alternative sources of income. Collectively, the potential benefits of community energy projects are nationally significant.”

I agree and draw the Parliament’s attention to the fact that Fife Council is currently bringing forward more than £11 million of investment in wind generation projects. The profits from the projects will go back into the council and therefore into the communities of Fife.

I believe that we should be doing more, should be more ambitious and should put in place more support for not only councils but local communities to develop their own community energy projects, with the profits going back into local resources and local facilities. Compared with much of Europe, Scotland is far behind when it comes to community ownership of renewables and green energy. In the past 20 months, Fife Council has made great progress; I hope that the Scottish Government will do more to support such an approach. Why should the private profiteers reap all the benefits in this area of development?

I will also touch on opencast coal mines, as I have two large opencast sites in my constituency—at Kelty and Crossgates. At both sites the owners and operators went bust, leaving a real threat to the restoration proposals and a potential environmental disaster for the communities. The NPF3 document states:

“Poor attention to restoration obligations has left a legacy of opencast coal sites in South Lanarkshire, East Ayrshire, Fife and elsewhere, requiring intervention to ensure that they are properly restored.”

In my constituency, Westfield also sits in that category. It is crucial that we learn the key lessons from the failures over the last year and put in place an insurance policy and a level of bond that will cover all the costs of restoration. Moreover, as the sites are worked there must be a clear policy on progressive restoration that is scrutinised properly by the planning authority.

Finally, there is a big question about who pays for the infrastructure to make large housing developments happen. Not just roads, water and drainage but new schools, community facilities, national health service medical centres and much more must come with major housing infrastructure developments. I am not sure that the Government has bottomed out that issue. Much more work needs to be done as we move forward on NPF3, which I welcome.

15:52

**Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** I will focus on areas of NPF3 that the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee scrutinised.

In his evidence to the committee, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Paul Wheelhouse, said:

“We see Scotland as having a living landscape—one that can be considered in the round for all of the potential that it provides, through sound management that is in sympathy with nature.”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 19 February 2014; c 3278.]

No reasonable person would disagree with that view. Scotland’s land has been put to work and utilised for many hundreds of years, and the landscape in which we take pride has in many instances been shaped by man. We should surely support the continuation of the shaping of the landscape in an environmentally responsible manner, in pursuit of sustainable economic growth.

In focusing on the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee’s work on NPF3, I begin with the siting of wind farms around towns and villages. In the context of energy policy, particularly wind energy, the Minister for Local Government and Planning, Derek Mackay, made it clear that a great deal of effort and attention had gone into the revised SPP and NPF3 to provide greater clarity and more guidance.

That is welcome, but I think that the minister will accept that more is needed, because even those of us who support onshore wind development recognise that the current system is not without its flaws. For example, people whom I represent are unhappy about the 20m neighbour notification distance, and there is confusion about what is and is not a settlement in the context of separation distance. There is sometimes a sense that it is unfair that a developer whose application has been rejected by the local authority can appeal to a Government reporter, when no such right of appeal exists for local people when their council grants planning consent—although I note that the minister pointed out that roughly two thirds of appeals are rejected.

Mr Mackay made it clear to the committee that the Government will not consider a third-party right of appeal, which was suggested by someone who provided written evidence. I think that we all recognise that the introduction of such a right might be fraught with difficulty, not least in relation to the definition of a legitimate third party, given that all too often wind farm proposals attract the attention of self-appointed anti-wind-energy groups who have no genuine locus in the development at issue.

I was pleased to hear that the minister recognises that there are issues to be addressed and that work is going on to ensure that there is better engagement at the start of the process, at the pre-application consultation stage and in the production of development plans in areas of search. I agree with him that, rather than have the public become objectors and appellants at the end of the process, we should encourage them to engage better at the outset and that we should be front-loading the planning system in engagement terms.

I welcome the rolling out of the good practice guidance that is being worked up between SNH and developers. It focuses on what developers can and should do to make others aware of developments in their areas.

I also look forward to hearing the outcome of consideration of whether it might be better to have clear definitions of what constitutes a wind farm and a settlement, along with action to ensure that local development plans are more up to date than just over a third of them currently are. That would provide further welcome clarity.

In evidence to the committee, SEPA said that it felt that the framework could go further by requiring that a carbon assessment be conducted for all developments, and Scottish Environment LINK suggested that a requirement might be placed on local authorities, when they are considering an application for a major development, to take into account the carbon impact of the development and how it will help Scotland to realise its carbon reduction targets.

The minister pointed out that there is already a requirement for detailed assessments to be undertaken in relation to major developments and that, currently, local development plans are required to outline how they will support low-carbon living. However, if we are to complete the journey towards genuine low-carbon living, we surely need to be explicit. Therefore, as the committee's report makes clear, we believe that carbon assessment should be required for all developments.

We need to send a clear message to developers and those who are charged with policing them that every step that we take from here on in must be taken with thought for the impact that we have on our environment. If we are serious about bringing about the behavioural and cultural change across society that is needed to achieve the targets that are laid out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and in RPP2, we must take the opportunity that NPF3 and the SPP represent to send that message.

On flooding, the committee is suggesting that NPF3 might be strengthened to make it clear that

housing or other forms of development should, at all times, avoid flood-risk areas. That perhaps seems an obvious point, and Scotland is by no means as exposed in this regard as other countries, but I wonder whether we should be looking not only at areas that we know are currently at risk of flooding.

Given the direction of travel with regard to increased flooding incidents and their occurrence in areas that traditionally did not suffer to the extent that they have lately, we need to be one step ahead of the game in anticipating where, courtesy of climate change, the existing problem might have spread in 10, 20 or 30 years. Even if we, as a country and as a society, succeed in seriously reducing our emissions, we are still liable to experience continuing climate change consequences in the short to medium term, and we must be prepared for that.

With the flood risk maps and the detailed hazard maps, we have the basis for that preparedness. The Minister for Environment and Climate Change told the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee that the draft planning policy has been revised to reflect flood risk and that flood risk is noted as a national issue in NPF3. Mr Mackay reassured us that flood risk, water attenuation and waste would be considered in any planning decisions on drainage and infrastructure.

We need to be crystal clear with the planning authorities that they need to consider not only what we know or think we know but what we might reasonably anticipate. If developments are to be sanctioned on land that might, given the trajectory that we are on, reasonably be expected to become susceptible to some degree of flooding, we must demand drainage provision that caters to that possibility and the prospect of the problem potentially worsening.

It is in the nature of a process such as this one that we challenge the rationale for what is or is not in the document or what was in the original draft and is not there now, and hold the Government to account. That is how it should be. However, across the stakeholders from whom we took evidence, there was near unanimity on the view that the draft NPF3 is an improvement on NPF2 and that the tone and the language is positive and ambitious.

I hope that my speech has served as a taster of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's report. It has been interesting to hear about the reports that have been produced by other committees. I look forward to the minister's response, today and in the future, to the various points that have been raised.

15:59

**Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill)**

**(Lab):** Since the introduction of the first national planning framework, we have had long periods of economic and population growth, followed by economic downswings that have created investment uncertainty. That emphasises the need for the planning system to have a high degree of strategic capability in order to create the flexibility to deal with change, and to implement strategic initiatives, such as the Ravenscraig regeneration programme that, although it is not in my constituency, will have a hugely beneficial impact on my area, if it can be developed properly and can achieve the positive outcomes that we all hope for it.

It is not easy to strike the right balance between stimulating investment and promoting appropriate schemes. We require a highly effective and efficient planning system in order to stimulate investment and build business confidence.

We have to get it right on issues such as land supply, transport infrastructure, water supply and energy generation. Unfortunately, because of the unexplained changes in NPF3 since the publication of the "Main Issues Report", I do not know whether the document provides a robust outline for where we need to be in the longer term, in indicating where priorities should lie and setting the scene for major developments.

I will explore a few concerns on which I would appreciate clarification from the minister. The NPF3 "Main Issues Report" of April 2013 stated:

"In addition to our nationally important, most scenic, landscapes, we also want to continue our strong protection for our wildest landscapes."

For some reason, however, NPF3 contains no mention of the core area of wild land map. I share the John Muir Trust's concerns in that regard and I would welcome an explanation from the minister of why that is the case.

**Derek Mackay:** I thank Michael McMahon for giving me the opportunity to clarify that point. I intend to put our final conclusions on wild land—whatever they are—in SPP rather than in NPF3. Of course there are links, but that particular element of planning policy is more appropriately homed in SPP.

**Michael McMahon:** I thank the minister for that clarification, but we often discuss in the Parliament whether something should be in a bill or in guidance, and I am in no doubt that the John Muir Trust is right to ask for a sentence to be added to section 4.4 of NPF3 to acknowledge our nationally important scenic and wildest landscapes and recognise the need for their vigorous protection.

I no longer get to the top of Scotland's mountains, as I once did, but I still love visiting our wee bits of hill and glen and I make no secret of the pain that I feel at the despoiling and desecration of some of our finest scenery by the erection of wind turbines across swathes of our countryside.

**Rob Gibson:** As a member who has 14 of the 40 wild land areas in my constituency, I am aware that many of my constituents wish to know what future they would have if there is to be further restriction. Although we are interested in the way that people in the cities like to visit their wee bits of hill and glen, we like to live there. Perhaps Michael McMahon will give us some support.

**Michael McMahon:** A balance has to be struck, but I am not convinced that the balance is right at present.

I accept that wind farms have a part to play in our present and future energy production capacity, but I am far from convinced that the right balance is being struck between the development of wind farms and the protection of our wild lands. I certainly do not agree with Scottish Renewables that NPF3 presents

"a significant risk",

and that it could create

"a barrier to the economic and environmental benefits"

that renewables

"can bring to Scotland."

If anything, the trend towards defiling too many landscapes will continue to go virtually unchecked if more protections are not included in NPF3.

As the Mountaineering Council of Scotland states with regard to badly sited wind farms,

"It is deeply disturbing that the renewables lobby is using all its influence to push the Scottish Government into abandoning proposals that would give some protection to one of Scotland's greatest natural assets."

If the council is wrong, it would not take much for the Scottish Government to insert the protection that the John Muir Trust asks for in order to dispel those concerns.

I also query section 5.18 of NPF3, which concerns the recognition that rail freight networks are to become increasingly important. I do not expect the minister to comment on the specific proposals that are currently before planners in North Lanarkshire Council, but I would appreciate his confirmation that NPF3 identifies Mossend railhead as a location that will play an important role in fulfilling Scotland's potential export growth. Can the minister outline the level of discussion that has taken place between Transport Scotland and the owners of Mossend railhead in recognising the role that the facility could play in

enhancing the rail freight network as identified in NPF3?

I have mentioned previously the importance of Ravenscraig to the regeneration of central Lanarkshire. I welcome the fact that the project has been reinstated as a national development, having initially been downgraded to one of only regional significance. However, North Lanarkshire Council has raised concerns about the changing description of the development and in particular the removal of the reference to a new town centre, which it argues should be reinstated. I have never been fully convinced that Ravenscraig could be a town centre in the sense that our traditional settled communities would recognise, but if NPF3 has altered the status of the development, it would be helpful if the minister could offer an explanation as to why that has happened.

**Derek Mackay:** NPF3 has not in any way changed the status of the development. It has actually been upgraded into national development status. I hope that that reassures the member.

**Michael McMahon:** I thank the minister for that. I knew that the development had been upgraded to national development status, but the phrase “town centre” has a significance in terms of attracting investment and has implications in respect of the local structure plan. That is why North Lanarkshire Council made its submission to the consultation. The purpose of my speech was to get clarification, so if something could be put back into NPF3 that clarifies that for the council, we would all benefit from it.

As I said earlier, I cannot be completely content with NPF3 without clarification on the points that I raised—although the minister has attempted to answer some of them. I notice that he did not try to intervene when I talked about Mossend railhead, but I will leave that for his closing speech, when perhaps he will give me the clarification that we need on that. Only then will I be reassured that the document is as robust as we would all like it to be and as we all need it to be.

16:06

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** I am delighted to speak in this debate, in which I have a committee interest as a substitute member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. I have participated in several of the evidence sessions on this topic. I also have a regional interest as a South Scotland member.

I welcome NPF3 and, in particular, I welcome its ambition to

“respect, enhance and make responsible use of our natural and cultural assets”.

I will look at that ambition in the context of coal-bed methane and unconventional gas. I welcome paragraph 4.21 of NPF3, which states that the exploitation of coal-bed methane:

“will require careful planning to avoid negative environmental and community impacts”.

I fully endorse the proposal to create a buffer zone between unconventional onshore gas extraction and communities. In fact, I went further than some others on the committee in supporting a buffer zone of at least 2km, as proposed by Alison Johnstone MSP.

Like the rest of the committee, I welcome the minister’s commitment to consider whether the application processes for unconventional gas extraction and hydraulic fracturing fully involve communities. For that reason, the committee recommended that the final SPP provides fuller guidance to planning authorities on that matter, particularly to take on board the environmental and social impact that these developments can have on communities.

My interest in this matter is, as I said, a regional one. The village of Canonbie in Dumfriesshire has been extremely badly served by the current planning system, which has allowed, under delegated powers, full permission to Dart Energy, working with Buccleuch Estates, to drill for coal-bed methane at 19 separate sites around the village.

I have here a timeline of the controversy about coal-bed methane drilling around Canonbie that was provided to me by the newly formed residents association. It runs to four closely typed pages, which I do not have time to go through now. I think that that says something about the complexity of the issue and the difficulties for local communities in finding out exactly what is going on literally under their feet.

When the first planning consents were granted to unconventional sites in Canonbie in 2007-08 nobody knew what fracking or coal-bed methane was. Until 2013, the community council at Canonbie continued to believe that permission had been given for only exploratory activity.

**Claudia Beamish:** Does the member agree that it is definitely time—if it is not overdue—that the national planning framework and the SPP showed communities where the regulation is and what the process is? That is the clarity that we are now seeking.

**Joan McAlpine:** Yes, I agree. In fact, I think that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee’s recommendations sought more clarity on the issue. That was the problem at the time: people did not know the significance of the

developments or how to intervene and get information.

In 2013, the community council found that full permission had been granted and that, in 2010-11, controlled activities regulations licences were granted for the introduction of fracking fluids to groundwater. Even now, the community has been unable to obtain answers as to whether fracking ever took place in the village. As it turns out, details of hazardous chemical components used in fracking fluids are not required to be disclosed as part of the planning process, which in my view is morally wrong. That is why I welcome any improvement that introduces transparency and more community involvement. I welcomed the environment minister Paul Wheelhouse's comments to the committee, which Graeme Dey referred to. Mr Wheelhouse said:

"we in Scotland see ourselves as having an approach to unconventional gas that is distinct from that of the UK. The UK is entitled to take the position that it has ... but we in Scotland have taken the view that we need to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place, should any opportunity arise, so that unconventional gas is robustly regulated."— [Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, 19 February 2014; c 3305.]

At the same meeting, the Minister for Local Government and Planning, Derek Mackay, said that it will be up to local authorities to set the appropriate buffer zone. I hope that he understands that the way in which the local authority in Dumfries and Galloway handled planning does not give my constituents in Canonbie a great deal of confidence that the local authority will be the best authority to set a buffer zone. That is why I supported Alison Johnstone's suggestion to set buffer zones at 2km.

SEPA does not come out well when we study the Canonbie experience. In August 2012 a paper was submitted to SEPA's water and land policy and regulatory support group that identified poor borehole construction at Canonbie. The report stated that four wells in Canonbie were constructed with no cement casing between 100m and 400m below ground, which potentially allowed saline waters to travel up and contaminate aquifers. Despite that report, no action was taken with respect to the breach of the licence. The information came to light only when the Canonbie residents against coal developments group got the result of a freedom of information request this month, which members may have read about in the latest *Sunday Herald*. If SEPA was aware of those faulty boreholes in 2012, why was the public not informed and why, despite the faulty boreholes, were planning consents renewed for three years by Dumfries and Galloway Council in April 2013?

I do not expect the minister to have answers to those questions today, but I raise them as an

illustration of the need for greater transparency in the planning process. I would welcome his response to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's recommendations on that aspect of unconventional gas.

16:12

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I welcome the ambition of NPF3. There is much that I can support. It is good to have a national spatial plan and I am pleased that there is a focus on low-carbon places, as heat networks, energy storage, low-carbon high-density housing and transforming the way we travel will be key to achieving low carbon ambitions. The NPF should help to deliver those things.

The consultation revealed big tensions over energy priorities and the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee focused on renewables, wild land and unconventional gas developments.

I am extremely concerned that we see unconventional gas as an opportunity without having due regard for the risk. It is clear that unconventional gas in the UK will not lower energy prices, as it has done in the US. There is less land here and ownership rights are different. Lord Stern, the Energy and Climate Change Select Committee in Westminster and even Lord Browne of Cuadrilla Resources came to the same conclusion: shale gas will not have a material impact on gas prices.

I am pleased that the minister understands that there are risks and confirmed to us in committee that there must be a buffer zone between developments and communities. I proposed a buffer of at least 2km, which gained MSP support and is in line with Friends of the Earth Scotland's proposals. However, although a buffer zone can help to protect communities from the worst localised impacts, it will do nothing to militate against climate change impacts.

Today is the start of a public local inquiry on the UK's most advanced unconventional gas project: the Dart Energy project in Airth. I will not say anything to prejudice the outcome of that, but I am concerned that we are considering consents before the Government's independent expert panel has reported and before the Government has set the buffer zone. That is surely the wrong way round.

**Derek Mackay:** Without reference to any live planning application, as the member would expect, I comment on points made by Joan McAlpine and Alison Johnstone. Does the member agree that it is important that the Scottish Government is not pursuing the financial incentives that the UK Government is pursuing in relation to extraction of unconventional gas, in terms of planning

protection and environmental mitigation? Taking the time to get the buffer zone right is the right thing to do. In any planning application, environmental mitigation must be assessed and carried out, no matter what.

**Alison Johnstone:** I appreciate the minister's response, but it would have been more appropriate for an inquiry to have taken place once we had the information and a definitive position on a buffer zone had been confirmed.

The tension between renewables and wild land is difficult to resolve. I am not in favour of increasing the separation distance to a blanket 2.5km. It is important to consider proposals case by case. The right separation in one site will be different in another. The planning system is good at being flexible like that but it must get much better at listening and reacting to community concerns. The Planning Democracy briefing for today has some good suggestions that I strongly urge the minister to consider.

Energy companies made clear their concerns that use of the wild land map would constrain the development of onshore renewable energy. I believe that we need to protect our wildest landscapes from inappropriate development and I do not understand why hill tracks, for example, which can scar landscapes, do not require planning permission. It would be appropriate for the NPF to refer to protecting the wildest land to make it clear that those characteristics can be considered when big developments are being determined, but I do not support the SNH map creating a blanket assumption against turbine development. Wild land is not always biodiverse—a point that RSPB Scotland makes in its briefing. We know that mountain habitats are at dire risk from climate change. The best way to protect biodiverse habitats is to decarbonise.

As colleagues have mentioned, the most effective way to resolve tensions there is to maintain public support for renewables. There is good support at the moment, but if benefits from a "renewables revolution" are not shared equitably between communities and public and private interests, that good will disappear. Community and public ownership is the best way to build and maintain public support. Energy companies and the Government should be looking to develop large-scale community and public ownership models to ensure that those benefits really are shared.

The RSPB highlights the importance of the NPF and the SPP when it comes to meeting our climate change targets and the fact that the NPF contains several proposals that would increase climate change emissions. I therefore endorse RSPB Scotland's request that the Government clarifies how those will not result in increased emissions. I

would be grateful if the minister would address that point later this afternoon. I acknowledge Sarah Boyack's comments on bringing things together. Will the RPP have to address the increased emissions brought about by the NPF?

If we want to prevent the worst impacts of climate change, it is time to move to a truly low-carbon economy. We already have more than enough unburnable fossil fuels. I am surprised that a Government that introduced, rightly, such challenging climate change targets has not yet ruled out unconventional gas extraction. I urge it do so.

I concur with the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee's recommendation that the period for parliamentary scrutiny be extended to 90 days and welcome its view that sustainable development should underpin NPF3.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** Before I call the final speaker in the open debate, I remind members who have participated in the debate who have left the chamber that they should be back in the chamber for closing speeches.

16:18

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate. When the Parliament debated the draft framework last June, I was delighted to note the removal of any possibility that a coal-fired power station would be built at Hunterston in my constituency. Having had the privilege of serving as Cunninghame North's MSP for seven years, I can fully attest to the strong feelings that still exist in parts of my constituency on the matter. Indeed, members will recall that Ayrshire Power Ltd's planning application for the development of a coal-fired power station at Hunterston received some 21,000 objections—more than any other planning application has generated in Scottish planning history.

For my part, I submitted a detailed objection to APL's application and was proud to stand alongside local groups, environmentalists and other interested constituents throughout the long, hard campaign against the application.

Ultimately, APL was forced to bow to the unprecedented level of public opposition to its application, and I am pleased to note that the Scottish Government also listened to the concerns. For that reason, one of the most welcome aspects of NPF3 for me and many of my constituents is the removal of any prospect of a coal-fired power station at Hunterston.

Naturally I recognise that the Scottish Government did not base its decision solely on public opposition. Indeed, to have allowed a coal-



fired power station to be built at Hunterston would have been contrary to some of the Scottish Government's most important stated objectives.

One of those objectives is, of course, to continue making headway in reducing Scotland's carbon emissions. Scotland's adjusted carbon emissions have fallen by 25.7 per cent since 1990, and we are more than halfway to achieving our target of reducing those emissions by 42 per cent by 2020. The construction of a new coal-fired power station would have been a massive leap in the wrong direction.

What is more is that NPF3 includes a number of aspects that should be welcomed as positive steps forward in meeting Scotland's climate change targets, such as its promotion of active travel.

It was just last week that Parliament debated issues pertaining to Scotland's air quality, and I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has now committed itself to increasing investment in active travel by 50 per cent between 2012-13 and 2014-15. That could reduce Scotland's reliance on less environmentally friendly forms of travel, thus reducing carbon emissions in the process, as well as promoting improved health through increased exercise.

**Alison Johnstone:** Is the member aware that, after the years that he mentioned, the Government intends to reduce investment in active travel? Does the member agree that the Government could invest far more than the 1 per cent of the transport budget that is currently invested in active travel?

**Kenneth Gibson:** Active travel has to be further encouraged, and I would support any action to increase investment in that area.

I note that the Minister for Environment and Climate Change has welcomed NPF3 as having the potential to facilitate

"continued movement towards active travel"—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee*, 19 February 2014; c 3307.]

and that this potential is evidenced by the priority given to the national long distance cycling and walking network, which has been included in the third national planning framework as a national development. Route 753 of the national cycle network, from Gourrock to Ardrossan, with up to 15km of a new traffic-free and road route, and up to 10km of a new traffic-free route around Fairlie, are welcome, as is route 73, the Arran coastal path, including Brodick to Corrie, which has 9km of a new traffic-free route. All those benefit my constituents.

Thus, I warmly welcome NPF3. It is a solid framework that will promote regeneration and development throughout Scotland in a more

environmentally conscious manner than we have seen before.

However, although I welcome NPF3 on the whole, I have received a number of constructive concerns from constituents that I would now like to put forward to the Scottish Government on their behalf. I mentioned the inclusion of the national long distance cycling and walking network as a national development, and I have been contacted by Fairlie community trust with regard to that aspect of NPF3. It advised me that it has contacted Keith Brown, the Minister for Transport and Veterans, about the possibility of redirecting the cycling route from what it sees as the dangerously narrow pavements alongside the A78 in Fairlie, down towards the shore. In particular, I understand that the trust would be interested in hearing about the possibility of any funding being made available to facilitate that rerouting, and it would welcome any input that ministers could offer on that.

Specific concerns were raised by constituents who are unclear about the status of the national renewables infrastructure plan. I would therefore be grateful if ministers could update the Parliament on the status of the NRIP and how it helped to inform the third national planning framework.

I should also add that, although my constituents and I, as already mentioned, are delighted about the removal of any possibility of a coal-fired power station at Hunterston from NPF3, we are also keen for the location to be considered as a site for the development of renewables—perhaps taking advantage of the uniquely deep water at the port here. Page 27 of the proposed framework touches on that by highlighting Hunterston's excellent location, good transport connections and links to Irvine's life sciences enterprise area. It also points out that

"manufacturing and servicing support for offshore renewable energy development"

could be successfully delivered at Hunterston, which has important strategic value and grid connections that will be developed, including the link from Carradale in Kintyre and Connah's Quay in Wales. Thus, would ministers please say more about what the Scottish Government has done since the draft framework was published to look into opportunities for further renewables development at Hunterston, which, as I know ministers will appreciate, would be warmly welcomed in my constituency, particularly the opportunities for long-term employment?

Finally, I have been contacted by a number of constituents who have taken a very keen interest in the development of the third national planning framework but feel that the timescale for

consultation and scrutiny of the draft NPF3 was too short and perhaps, in their view, even a bit rushed. We heard about that in Maureen Watt's and Sarah Boyack's opening speeches, and we have heard it throughout the debate. Given the tremendous importance of the national planning framework in potentially setting the course of our country's development for the years and decades to come, my constituents felt that more time could have been allocated for consultation to ensure that we arrived at an optimal product.

Overall, I am pleased with the third national planning framework's contents. I look forward to further engagement with my constituents and the Scottish Government as we seek to follow through on the potential that the NPF3 offers to promote regeneration and development in North Ayrshire and across Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That brings us to the closing speeches.

16:25

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** As many other members have done, I thank all the committees and clerking teams who have contributed to the process and congratulate them on their work. The debate has been interesting and has thrown up a number of talking points, but it must be said that it is impossible to do justice to the sum total of work that has been done and that is contained in the reports.

When we began the debate, I was reminded of an incident during an earlier national planning framework process some years ago. I was contacted by letter by, and subsequently engaged in correspondence with, a gentleman from the Edinburgh area who put forward the proposition that nothing that happens outside the central belt could ever be of national importance to Scotland. Needless to say, I disagreed with him.

I am delighted that a number of members took the opportunity to press for their local or regional priorities, and I feel a certain sympathy for Alison McInnes, who was the only one who was rebuked by the minister for her attempt to put forward her views. Well, I agree with Alison—I take the view that there are many things going on in the north-east that are of great importance. For example, she mentioned the Dundee waterfront project and the east coast mainline railway to Aberdeen from Edinburgh. Those projects could do with being considered.

Alison McInnes also spoke at length about the carbon capture project at Peterhead, which has major potential to allow progress on many of the objectives that the Government and Parliament share. However, it is worthy of note that the £1 billion of support from the UK Government could

all be at risk if the minister gets his way and 18 September is remembered as the day when we decided to vote for independence, although I suspect that it might actually be remembered as the day on which the great disappointment began.

I have a couple of points to cover on the theme of representing the interests of Aberdeen and the north-east. I pay tribute to the minister for including in the planning framework comments on the need for new housing in the area. We all know about that, and the waiting lists testify to it, but the fact is that the NPF3 document contains no specific housing projects with national development status. In fact, we do not even have a definition of what would constitute a national development for housing. The Scottish Government is now not even talking a good game on housing.

**Derek Mackay:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alex Johnstone:** Allow me to develop my point.

To put that into perspective, we have heard about the importance of the north-east to the economy of Scotland as a whole. However, a recent survey from 2013 showed that more than 40 per cent of businesses in the north-east consider the availability of suitable housing stock as having a negative impact on attracting new people to the north-east. Just one business in 10 held the view that the availability of housing stock is having a positive impact on its business growth aspirations. If we are to understand and acknowledge the potential of Aberdeen and the north-east to act as an economic driver for the whole of Scotland, we should at the very least see the housing stock in the area as a national priority, in order to ensure that those who cannot buy into the north-east's overheated housing market have the opportunity to find accommodation.

**Mark McDonald:** The member will be aware that huge and significant housing developments are being planned for Aberdeen, particularly in my constituency. Does he accept that one factor that caused the delay in many of those developments was the fact that, for so long, Aberdeen went without an up-to-date local development plan?

**Alex Johnstone:** I admit that there are a number of issues, but they can be overcome by a Government that is determined to achieve its objective.

I also draw attention to the inclusion of Aberdeen harbour as a national development. The harbour plays a vital role in driving the success of the north-east economy. Last year, it generated around £500 million for the regional economy and supported 11,000 full-time equivalent jobs. It also handled 5.14 million tonnes of cargo. However, more must be done to secure and improve the

infrastructure that leads to and from the harbour. Many in the north-east remain disappointed that that has yet to materialise.

During the debate, a great deal has been said about wind farms. We have all been lobbied on the impact that they have on wild land and need to express our concerns about that. We heard some interesting concepts. Graeme Dey, I think—he can correct me if I am wrong—suggested that, by virtue of their opposition, those who oppose wind farms lose the right to object. I do not understand how that works, although I admit that he also said some important things about flood risk, which we need to address.

We have also had some discussion of unconventional gas. A great deal was said that was positive, but not enough is being done to exploit the opportunity.

**Rob Gibson:** Will Alex Johnstone give way on that?

**Alex Johnstone:** I am afraid that I am coming towards the end of my remarks.

Joan McAlpine said that she would like the unconventional gas industry to be robustly regulated. I agree with that principle—it is vital that we have a well-regulated industry—but, if robustly regulated means inappropriately delayed, that is not the way that we should go. More work and more understanding are needed, but we also need more progress towards a successful and properly environmentally regulated unconventional gas industry in Scotland.

I have talked at some length about the economic drivers of the north-east and what has been achieved. It must be pointed out that the oil and gas industry, which has brought the economic advantage to the north-east, could be extended to other regions of Scotland. The expertise and technology developed in the North Sea can deliver an effective hydrocarbon industry to large parts of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please close.

**Alex Johnstone:** We can use the opportunities that we already have to ensure that that valuable resource protects us economically and environmentally.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that you need to close now.

**Alex Johnstone:** I will do what I am told, then.

16:32

**Sarah Boyack:** This has been a really interesting debate. It strikes me that we have been conducting almost a series of debates, under the title of the national planning framework and

Scottish planning policy, because we have not only been debating the process of the national level of planning, what policies and projects should be contained in that and how we should get to conclusions on it but having a parallel discussion about the principles of town planning, the extent to which town plans are up to date, to what extent they should guide planning and to what extent communities should be involved. Therefore, the debate has been much more wide ranging than I would have expected a debate to be on the national planning framework, which is enough for a debate in itself.

I certainly agree with Alex Johnstone—I put that on the record because it is a very unusual statement for me to make—that we should thank the committees and all the witnesses for giving us the material, comments and background consideration that we have had from them. It has definitely strengthened our debate, but it has posed to the minister a series of major challenges about how we conclude the debate, the extent to which we have parliamentary scrutiny and the extent to which the process is transparent.

The concluding part of the process needs to be transparent. Several colleagues talked about that problem. When we are dealing with the balance of planning decisions at the local level, people lose track of what happened next and why the final conclusion was reached. I would be keen for the minister to tell us in his concluding remarks what the nature of the feedback to each of the committees will be and how he will take us to that point.

Perhaps he could set that out in writing following today's debate, once he has had time to reflect on not just what we have said, but the wealth of recommendations from all the various committees, which have been constructive in their criticism and have tried to come up with robust solutions for getting from where we are now to a sensible set of conclusions.

The discussion that we have had on the projects has been important, but before I talk about that, I want to reflect on a couple of the points that the Royal Town Planning Institute made. It said that, at the high level, the NPF and the SPP need to be both “influential and integrative”. That is a sensible and wise comment.

The RTPI also talked about the need for NPF3 and the SPP to be corporate documents that influence other key documents that are produced by the Government, such as the national marine plan, the infrastructure investment plan, the land use strategy and the zero waste strategy. That has been reflected in several of the speeches that have been made, such as those of Claudia Beamish—who commented on zero waste in the context of the RPP—and Rob Gibson. I think that

they were absolutely right: it comes back to what is in NPF3 and the SPP. If the climate change challenge is to be addressed successfully and the Government's targets are to be met in the medium to long term, NPF3 is key to delivering that.

The RTPI also made sensible suggestions about improving the process of approving the NPF and the SPP. It said that, for the parliamentary process that colleagues have just been through to become more effective and transparent, it needs to be better organised so that it is much more of an on-going process and involves more engagement. That echoes the recommendations of the committees. The process that has informed our consideration needs to be improved for the future.

I want to move on to the process of transparency and accountability. The comments that members of all parties have made illustrate the extent to which planning is, on one level, hugely political but, on another, not strictly party political. People have made a range of interesting comments on that. Members made good pleas for investment in their regions. Alison McInnes was told off for raising rail issues—she was told that it was not the railways debate. However, if we are thinking about the long-term climate challenge, the future development of our railways must be key. I am talking about not just the passenger side, but the freight side. There was a lot of detail on that in the reports of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee.

**Derek Mackay:** The point that I was trying to make to Alison McInnes was that there is a specific legislative and consultative process when it comes to rail investment, which a debate on the national planning framework is not necessarily the place to consider.

**Sarah Boyack:** On the other hand, it would be utterly remiss of our colleagues if they did not use the platform of a debate in Parliament to talk about rail investment in Fife. Alex Rowley mentioned rail projects in Rosyth and Levenmouth, as well as the Halbeath park and ride, and Maureen Watt spoke about freight in the north-east. Rail freight and rail in general are crucial to delivering long-term sustainability and successful economic growth in Scotland. The two must go together.

I will not repeat the comments that I made about the policy framework for energy and the need to get NPF3 right in that regard. I merely observe that, given that energy is one of the big-ticket issues for the Scottish Government, I find it astonishing that there is so much that has still not been pinned down, whether we are talking about significant pumped storage developments or fracking, unconventional gas or wind. Those issues are crucial to Scotland having a sustainable

economic future, and they must be pinned down. The series of documents that we are debating today is where we must get things right.

I do not envy the minister his task, but it is his job to come up with the right framework so that, at the local planning level, people know what is expected of them. The industry needs to know where it is being encouraged to go, if not given a green light, and where it is not being encouraged to go. It must be made aware of the need to be spot on when it comes to mitigating the impact on the environment and the landscape. It is also important for our communities to have the right framework. Energy is a key issue and, given that planning is totally devolved, the Scottish Government needs to get it right.

On the remarks from Claudia Beamish and Alex Rowley about opencast coal, environmental justice demands action. The Scottish Government must ensure that when the SPP and NPF3 documents are finalised, everybody knows where they stand. That is one of the key issues to have come out of today's debate.

On the comments from Maureen Watt, Cameron Buchanan, Mark McDonald, Graeme Dey and Stuart McMillan on the local plan process, I think that it would be worth having a whole other debate about local plans, the problems in getting them up to date and the challenge of ensuring that housing goes where local authorities want it to go. We need to get that infrastructure development and the economic benefit that comes from it.

Today's debate has really been about the national planning framework and Scottish planning policy documents. It must be our priority to get them right. I am keen to hear not just in the minister's winding-up speech but afterwards about how he will steer that process. Because there is so much uncertainty around the chamber, that is the top priority that needs to be addressed to move the debate forward.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Derek Mackay. Minister, you have up to 10 minutes.

16:40

**Derek Mackay:** Thank you for that generous amount of time, Presiding Officer.

We have made great progress on two fronts today. The first is planning in Scotland, and the second is my relationship with my opposite number in the Labour Party, who said that she was going to ignore only the start and the end of my speech, which means that the body of the speech was fundamentally sound and worth listening to. I think that that is progress.

**Sarah Boyack:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Derek Mackay:** I will take a brief one, although I want to get back to planning.

**Sarah Boyack:** My point was that I was not ignoring the middle of the minister's speech and that I was engaging with the content and process of NPF3. That is the key thing for all of us today.

**Derek Mackay:** I thank the member for that clarification.

Another colleague, Rob Gibson, accused me of being Churchillian in the delivery of planning policy. On Sarah Boyack's question about whether this is the end of the process, I can say that this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.

Fair reflections have been made in the debate, particularly by Sarah Boyack, about the amount of time that we have to study the committee reports before responding to them. However, it would have been somewhat ridiculous if I had come to the chamber today with a concluded Government position on every single matter, having had only a few days' notice of the committees' considerations.

I have fulfilled the obligations on the Scottish Government in respect of NPF3 and the legislation. I have engaged with the committees as requested, having made four committee appearances with relevant ministers and shared the information that has been required. However, I will certainly consider how we consult and engage further on the final iterations of NPF3 and, crucially, SPP. There was no onus on the Government or me to expose policies to the committees or the Parliament, but that was the right thing to do because they are so clearly aligned with NPF3 and SPP.

It is fair for the Government say how it intends to proceed on each committee's recommendations. In a number of areas, we did not take a closed-mind approach or railroad policies through. Where we felt that further consultation, evidence or expert opinion was required, we undertook to provide it while maintaining the timetable in the participation statement that we outlined at the start of the process in September 2012. However, I will reflect carefully on all the recommendations on and questions about the process.

We should welcome the fact that there is so much consensus around the 14 national developments and the host of policy areas that have not been controversial and which represent progress for Scotland. I enjoyed sharing information about them with my Irish counterpart earlier today when we discussed issues including the planning system and the national planning framework. Ireland wants to emulate some of the work that we have undertaken in Scotland.

**Claudia Beamish:** Can the minister comment on the absence from NPF3 of the national ecological network, which was in NPF2?

**Derek Mackay:** The criteria against which we considered which of the 242 projects would receive national designation were shared with the committees. It was felt that, although the national ecological network was valued and important and although we intend to refer to it, it did not comply with all the criteria for national designation. We did not see what value it added and felt that it might detract effort from the central Scotland green network. That is not to underplay the network; there are other ways in which we can support it without giving it national designation status. We intend to refer to it, as we have in previous iterations of the national planning framework.

All bids or requests for national designation have been considered carefully, and we have shared openly how we have arrived at the decisions on those that have continued to be included and those that have not. Some projects are no longer included because they are reaching completion or will be complete by June 2014, when the national planning framework will be in place. The process has been on-going for the past two years.

Kevin Stewart touched on the relationship between community planning and planning, which was also touched on by the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. The recognition of that relationship was welcome and right. This is about making difficult decisions. We are not avoiding them, and we want them to be evidence based and carefully made because our policies are creating a legacy for the future and we must get the decisions right in terms of their impacts on the environment and sustainable economic growth.

Claudia Beamish helpfully asked for further clarification that sustainable development will underpin the planning system, and I can tell her that it will. The presumption in favour of sustainable development will provide that clarity while contributing to the Government's overarching purpose of sustainable economic growth. The nature of the planning system is such that all these policies will be followed by crystal-clear planning advice notes and guidance to help the decision makers—front-line councillors, planners and other stakeholders—to be well informed and make the right decisions. A number of members said that clarity is important and that we must not fudge issues and leave people in doubt about what should be considered when planning decisions are made. I hope that the final documents will provide that clarity.

During the debate and in the committees, I felt that it was important to gauge members' opinions

in order to inform the work rather than to prejudice it as we reach the final stage of producing the national plan for Scotland, which is a spatial expression of the Government's economic strategy, and Scottish planning policy.

Many members, with Kevin Stewart leading the way, commented on the number of local development plans that are not up to date. That is fair criticism and is why I have undertaken a planning action plan to ensure that all planning authorities' local development plans are up to date. Cameron Buchanan asked how we can have a plan-led planning system if we do not have credible plans. The emphasis must be on ensuring that those plans are delivered. I welcome, in addition to the proactive planning agenda, the powers in the Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Act 2014.

I will return to onshore wind, separation distance and definitions, among other issues that members have raised in the debate.

On unconventional gas extraction, I believe that there are environmental safeguards, but we will value the expert advice when it comes, which will inform the debate. We are not pursuing the financial incentives that exist south of the border. I will reflect carefully on what Joan McAlpine and other members have asked for.

I hope that I have clarified that SPP is a more appropriate place for references to core areas of wild land. As Michael McMahon and other members have pointed out, it makes sense to refer to the issue in the national planning framework, too, but the body of that work would feature better elsewhere.

It is unfortunate that the timing of some of the evidence has meant that I have been unable to come to the chamber with a complete view. I still think that it is right to take the evidence first, before making a final decision on what are incredibly technical matters. It is also right that, having reflected on future national planning frameworks, we improve the process. However, I note that I have gone beyond what I was required to do in terms of community engagement—

**Sarah Boyack:** The minister has helpfully mentioned one or two issues that he will come back to. Will he add opencast coal mining restoration to his to-do list, please?

**Derek Mackay:** Of course, we will be assisted by the task force that is chaired by Fergus Ewing and which is considering regulation and monitoring and reflecting on planning policy. The issue is under consideration alongside our proposed draft policies.

There are many other areas that I cannot cover in the time that is left. There will be on-going

monitoring of NPF3 and the delivery action plan, and there will be further engagement with local communities.

On local bids for action, I believe that the package touches every part of the country through investment and planning support. Just because some projects do not feature, that does not mean that development should not go ahead. For example, our weighting on economic impact and sustainable economic growth should support housing development in the right places. Across the country, there will be benefits from infrastructure investment, the digital fibre network, grid enhancements and strategic airport enhancements, and the central belt will benefit from the central Scotland green network. A host of other national developments will touch every part of the country.

I want every part of the country to feel ownership of NPF3 and I will reflect on the full geographic spread of the policies. I have said throughout that economic impact should have greater weighting in the planning system. It should be given due weighting, when that is appropriate, to ensure that we deliver economic recovery, accelerate economic growth sustainably and create policies whose language is accessible to the community at large. The framework should also become an investment document for Scotland.

There is much to be positive about in the debate and in the engagement with the debate. Community involvement is important; communities have had a great deal of involvement in the process, but we have learned some lessons.

I hope that there is a great deal of confidence in what has been said today, because there is a great deal of consensus about the policies and positions that we have arrived at. When the work is concluded, I hope that it will leave us with an ambitious document for Scotland's sustainable economic growth.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call John Wilson to wind up the debate on the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's behalf.

16:51

**John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** The debate has shown the value of the Parliament considering and engaging in the planning system. That is true not just for the proposed national planning framework that we are considering but for the wider discussion about planning, which includes issues such as how Scottish planning policy guides the planning process, how Scotland's spatial development should be taken forward and how we develop the criteria to decide

the types of national development that should be included in the framework.

I start by reflecting on the main themes in the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's report. As a Parliament, we need to consider the planning policies that we have put in place and ask the following questions. Is the planning system having a significant impact on delivering progress on economic competitiveness, environmental protection and social justice? Is it delivering on our commitment to sustainable development? Is it enabling things to happen where they should and preventing them from happening where they should not?

From what we have heard this afternoon, I believe that the answer to those questions is yes. However, we must not be complacent.

The debate has offered the Government the opportunity to address some of the shortcomings that we identified in the proposed framework. The committee highlighted the need for the Parliament to have a greater role in setting out the policies that underpin our planning system. We must also take a greater role in shaping the development of future frameworks before any public consultation gets under way. We welcome the level of public engagement that the Government undertook on the proposed framework. However, we feel that a more co-ordinated approach is needed to informing the public about and engaging them in the planning system. We hope that the Government will seek to address that issue.

As the committee's convener, Kevin Stewart, said when he opened the debate, planning is one of the most important areas of public policy, because it is fundamental to the success of many other policy areas. However, as the convener and others pointed out, the planning system is often seen as complicated and difficult to navigate. That is especially true for ordinary members of the public, who are often ill equipped to deal with and lack information about the planning system.

One witness highlighted in his evidence to the committee the fact that, in his experience, members of community councils often know little about how the planning process works, although community councils are usually the first port of call for communities. Other witnesses spoke of the confusion that phrases such as "green belt" can cause in the minds of the public. That highlights the need for a more joined-up approach to be taken to engaging ordinary people in the planning system. I am sure that the committee will return to that issue later this year when we consider the community empowerment bill.

I turn to the issues that other committees raised. This is one of the first debates in which four committee reports have been put to the chamber

at the same time. That must be welcomed; it shows the consideration that those committees gave to feeding into the debate.

The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee pointed to concerns about the lack of clarity in the framework on rules that surround onshore wind farms and unconventional oil and gas extraction—or fracking, as it is now commonly known. Indeed, I was struck by how those concerns reinforce the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's views on the need to integrate and merge the where of the national planning framework with the how of Scottish planning policy. Clarity in the planning system is a key factor in that context.

The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee highlighted the lack of information in the framework on how areas of core wild land may affect economic development and called on the Government to provide clearer guidance to planning authorities, developers and the public on unconventional oil and gas extraction.

It is safe to say that, when the Parliament considered the second national planning framework in 2009, most people in Scotland had never heard of the term fracking, but fracking is now fast becoming one of the dominant topics for public discussion in relation to the planning system, as Joan McAlpine outlined in her speech. That demonstrates the need for the planning system to keep pace with modern developments. Today's debate provides the Government with an opportunity to ensure that the finalised framework and Scottish planning policy properly reflect those concerns.

The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee also said that, in future, consultations on issues such as fracking and areas of wild land should be concluded before the Government presents a proposed national planning framework to the Parliament. Again, that view chimes with the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's call for the Parliament to be fully engaged from the start of the process of developing the next framework.

Our colleagues on the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee scrutinised a wide variety of policy areas, such as transport, housing, sustainability and digital infrastructure. The committee highlighted the need to ensure that planning supports Scotland's climate change targets. That is especially true for the future development of our main airports.

Indeed, the theme of sustainability featured heavily across the work of all four committees. Sustainability and the impact on residential areas of developments such as high-speed rail and sea ports must be considered carefully.

On housing supply, the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee echoed some of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's concerns about the number of local authorities that do not have up-to-date development plans. In a plan-led system, it is vital that local development plans are up to date, otherwise we risk undermining the planning system's credibility.

Our colleagues on the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee pointed out that the framework will play a fundamental role in reducing Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions, but they also highlighted several areas in which it could be improved.

This winter, mother nature has reminded us all—as if we needed reminding—of the challenges that climate change presents for communities across the country. Nowhere are those challenges more evident than in relation to flooding. The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, reinforced by Claudia Beamish and Graeme Dey, pointed to the need for the framework to align with flood management plans and to ensure that housing and other developments are not constructed in flood-risk areas.

The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee also highlighted the benefits of the carbon calculator tool, which is used in assessing wind farm developments, and called for it to be rolled out to all developments across Scotland. The committee's convener, Rob Gibson, stressed the need to restore peat and bog land environments right across Scotland, not just those that are located in the north and north-west.

A number of members have taken the opportunity to make the case for developments in their own constituencies. I welcome that, and hope that they will discuss those developments with Government ministers.

I commend the reports of all four committees to the Parliament and look forward to the Scottish Government acting on the recommendations in them, the final version of the national planning framework and the revised Scottish planning policy taking account of them, and our moving forward with a planning policy that benefits Scotland as a whole.

## **Standards Commission for Scotland (Reappointment of Member)**

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-09349, in the name of Liam McArthur, on the reappointment of a member of the Standards Commission for Scotland.

17:00

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I speak to the motion in my name as a member of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, to invite members to agree to the reappointment of Matt Smith as a member of the Standards Commission for Scotland.

The commission has five part-time members. As I am sure that members are aware, its role is to encourage high ethical standards in public life. It does that by promoting and enforcing the codes of conduct for councillors and members of devolved public bodies. In addition to promoting the codes, the commission receives reports from the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland following his investigation into alleged breaches of the codes. If the commission upholds the commissioner's findings, it determines, in accordance with the legislation, the sanction to be applied.

Under the Scottish Parliamentary Commissions and Commissioners etc Act 2010, members of the commission are reappointed by the SPCB with the Parliament's agreement. The SPCB sat as a reappointment panel on 30 January 2014. I chaired the panel and the other members were Linda Fabiani and David Stewart. I thank Tony Swabe for confirming by way of a validation certificate that the nomination is made on merit following a fair and robust reappointment process that conformed to good practice. Details of the information that was considered by the SPCB and the criteria on which Matt Smith was assessed are set out in the report lodged by the SPCB in the Scottish Parliament information centre.

Matt Smith will, we believe, continue to ensure that high ethical standards are upheld in public life. I am sure that the Parliament will want to thank him for his contribution to date and wish him well in his work as a commission member.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the reappointment of Matt Smith as a member of the Standards Commission for Scotland under Schedule 7 of the Scottish Parliamentary Commissions and Commissioners etc. Act 2010.



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

## Decision Time

17:01

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

The first question is, that S4M-09355, in the name of Kevin Stewart, on the Scottish Government's third national planning framework and the review of Scottish planning policy, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the reports of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee (SP Paper 490), the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee (SP Paper 487), the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee (SP Paper 491) and the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee (SP Paper 492) on the Scottish Government document, *Ambition, Opportunity, Place: Scotland's Third National Planning Framework, Proposed Framework*, and the *Official Report* of the Parliament's debate on these reports, should form the Parliament's response to the Scottish Government on the proposed framework.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that S4M-09349, in the name of Liam McArthur, on the reappointment of a member of the Standards Commission for Scotland, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees to the reappointment of Matt Smith as a Member of the Standards Commission for Scotland under Schedule 7 of the Scottish Parliamentary Commissions and Commissioners etc. Act 2010.

## Down's Syndrome Awareness Week

### The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-08971, in the name of John Wilson, on Down's syndrome awareness week 2014. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

#### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that 21 March 2014 is the UN World Down's Syndrome Day that aims to raise awareness of the condition caused by extra material in chromosome 21; understands that Down's syndrome is the most frequently recognised cause of learning disability; considers that World Down's Syndrome Day and Down's Syndrome Awareness Week, 17 to 23 March 2014, are opportunities for people throughout Scotland, including Central Scotland, to reflect on the value of people with learning difficulties in Scottish society; understands that Down's Syndrome Scotland's vision is that society fully accepts and includes people with Down's syndrome; considers that the charity supports its members with Down's syndrome to achieve their full potential; welcomes the Communication Skills Project currently run by Down's Syndrome Scotland and being evaluated by the University of Strathclyde; understands that this pilot project aims to help children from 12 months to improve their communication skills and upskill parents in supporting their children's speech and language, complementing speech and language therapy sessions; acknowledges the wide range of issues likely to affect people with Down's syndrome at different stages in their lives, including screening, education, employment, independent living or dementia, and recognises the importance of early intervention to ensure the best quality of life for people with Down's syndrome.

17:03

**John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I thank the members across the chamber who signed my motion and who are here this evening. I welcome to the gallery those from Down's Syndrome Scotland.

In many ways, this is a timely debate because it acknowledges the important date of 21 March as the United Nations world Down's syndrome day and recognises that it is Down's syndrome week from 17 to 23 March 2014.

The charity Down's Syndrome Scotland provides support and services to people with Down's syndrome. It recently won the public choice award at the Scottish adventure awards. It is vital that Parliament raises awareness of Down's syndrome among the wider public and looks at the approach so that the quality of life for everyone with a learning disability is improved.

Down's syndrome affects approximately 20 per cent of the learning-disabled population and is the single biggest cause of learning disability. The chance of a woman conceiving a child with Down's syndrome increases with age, but 80 per cent of

children with Down's syndrome are born to women who are younger than 35. Nearly one in every 1,000 babies who are born in Scotland will have Down's syndrome. The charity Down's Syndrome Scotland thinks that more work should be done on screening and maternity care, so that people can make informed decisions.

The thrust of this week's campaign is about people living their lives to the full and achieving their full potential. There are a lot of misconceptions out there about Down's syndrome. Life expectancy has increased significantly over time, and there are people with Down's syndrome who are 60 and older. Down's is a lifelong condition, which cannot be cured, but it is vital that we recognise that many children who have the condition attend mainstream education. The campaign is essential in offering serious balance as it engages with wider public perceptions about Down's syndrome.

Adults with Down's syndrome can and do live independently and are productive in the workforce, although in the current economic climate it remains difficult for people with the condition to find employment. The contribution of people with learning difficulties is not in doubt, but more needs to be done to encourage employers to take people on. It is clear to me that a lack of employment can only erode the confidence of people with Down's syndrome, especially younger members of society. It is important that the Scottish Government considers how to make apprenticeships more accessible to young adults with Down's syndrome.

Down's Syndrome Scotland offers valuable support to families in central Scotland. Its central Scotland branch, which is based in Falkirk, is organising an open day at Grange community centre on Saturday 22 March. Members, carers, parents and siblings will no doubt be present that afternoon.

Much more can be done. The recent changes in the welfare benefits system have not been helpful, to put it mildly. No doubt tomorrow's budget will bring more of the same, with more caps on benefits. Current changes have meant that individuals are required to do more to prove their incapacity, and many parents do not think that that is a useful approach for people who are born with a condition such as Down's syndrome. We should remember that behind the welfare cuts are human faces.

Through Down's Syndrome Scotland's communication skills project, which is being evaluated by the University of Strathclyde, communication skills workshops have been set up in Edinburgh, Glasgow, East Kilbride, Perth, Aberdeen, Inverness and Orkney, providing support to 84 families. I recognise the good work that Down's syndrome charities are doing

throughout central Scotland and beyond. Such work relies on funding being available for services and organisations that help and support families. We should ensure that services are maintained and that the best possible opportunities are offered to people in Scotland who live with Down's syndrome.

A number of people in Scotland who have Down's syndrome play an active part in society. There are people who have moved through the education system and who have even been elected to represent their communities. If they are given skills and opportunities, many people with Down's syndrome can play an active part in society. The Minister for Children and Young People told me that she recently visited the Ups and Downs Theatre Group, which is based in Motherwell but performs in Hamilton. I know that many individuals with Down's syndrome get involved in acting. I also know that the Chryston and district pipe band's pipe major has Down's syndrome.

There is nothing to stop people with Down's syndrome becoming actively involved in their communities. It is wider society that prevents many of those people from playing an active role. As I said earlier, it is the perceptions among many members of the public that hinder those individuals. As a society, we have to think about how we treat people with Down's syndrome and how we give them the opportunity to play a full role in society.

I reiterate the point that I made about employment opportunities. I make a plea to the minister about the opportunity for people with Down's syndrome to get apprenticeships to allow them to move into full employment. As I indicated, some individuals who have been diagnosed with Down's syndrome are living to 60 and beyond, and they can play an active role in society. We have to move forward and recognise that we should give them every opportunity to participate in society.

It is significant that Glasgow will hold the world Down's syndrome congress in 2018. I hope that everyone in this chamber, and everyone who is listening to this debate, will take forward the case for ensuring that individuals with Down's syndrome do not feel persecuted, are not held back and are given every opportunity to move forward.

17:11

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** I congratulate John Wilson on bringing the debate to the chamber, and I take the opportunity to thank Down's Syndrome Scotland for the work that it does and for the briefing that it provided ahead of today's debate, which I found helpful.

I want to focus my speech on two little girls who have had an impact on my life at different stages. Seventeen years ago, a little girl called Abigail entered my family's life. My parents had signed up to Barnardo's Scotland's home from home respite service and, as a result, became respite care providers to a local family whose four-year-old daughter, Abigail, had Down's syndrome. I freely admit that at that time, as a teenager who was still at secondary school, I was not knowledgeable about Down's syndrome. However, from interacting with Abigail on the occasions when she would come to visit our family, I learned that people with Down's syndrome are as capable as any of the rest of us of living life to its fullest and enjoying life to its fullest, when they are given the opportunities to do so.

Abigail now lives in Devon, has attended college, and turns 21 next month. My parents will be going down for her 21st birthday party, having already attended her 18th. Thanks to the advent of social media, I am able to keep in contact with Abigail once again, despite the fact that she has moved away from my area.

The second little girl whom I would like to talk about is called Poppy. Her mum, Debra, is my wife's friend, and the family live not far from us in Aberdeen. Debra did not know that she was having a Down's syndrome baby. The blood test did not show her as having the one in 150 risk that would then allow further diagnostic screening to take place. I realise that the national health service guidance says that that blood test should not be taken as an absolute and that the fact that a woman is not shown as having the one in 150 risk does not eliminate the potential that her child might be born with Down's syndrome. What it means is that a post-natal diagnosis is required.

Poppy is a delightful and happy girl, who attended nursery with my son—they were Joseph and Mary in the Seaton nursery's nativity play. Poppy has gone to the local primary school—Dyce primary school—which is a mainstream place of education. That emphasises the point that John Wilson made and which was highlighted by Down's Syndrome Scotland in its briefing, which is that many children with Down's syndrome attend mainstream schools. Although that is obviously apparent to parents of children who attend school alongside a child with Down's syndrome, wider society perhaps does not recognise that the opportunity for mainstream education is as open to children with Down's syndrome as it is to any other child.

I have noted the work that Down's Syndrome Scotland has been doing, because Poppy's mother Debra has done some fundraising for the organisation. She is among many people who value the support that it provides to families.

I note the 2018 congress, which John Wilson highlighted, and I note the range of subjects that will be included among the discussions at it. The congress is a fantastic opportunity to highlight the work that is being done internationally and to learn and give lessons about Down's syndrome internationally.

I entirely agree with John Wilson that we all need to work together. I commend the work of Down's Syndrome Scotland. My experiences will ensure that I will continue to do my bit to share the knowledge that I have gained and to challenge the myths that Down's Syndrome Scotland has highlighted so that we give the best possible opportunities in society to people with Down's syndrome.

17:16

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I congratulate John Wilson on securing the debate during Down's syndrome awareness week. I join him in applauding the work of Down's Syndrome Scotland—both the general work that it does every day of the year and its success in bringing the world Down's syndrome congress to Scotland in 2018. It is a laudable achievement on the part of Down's Syndrome Scotland to bring a worldwide community together. It shows the commitment that we in Scotland have to improving inclusion and support for disabled people. By its very nature, the bid was inclusive from the start, as it was led by Andrew Macintyre, Stuart Campbell and Sam Ross, each of whom has Down's syndrome. They are members of the host group, Down's Syndrome Scotland, under the banner, "People make Glasgow inclusive."

The previous congress was held in Cape Town in 2012, and was the 11th to be held by Down Syndrome International. The large number of self-advocates who attended the event was notable. That should be encouraged as far as possible at the Glasgow event, because it offers a unique opportunity to learn from best practice and to gain a greater understanding of how our services can be made more person centred. The basic need to live independently and with a degree of self-advocacy is a common theme of discussions with disabled service users, and it is right that that be viewed within the context of human rights.

Down's syndrome is the most frequently recognised form of learning disability, with approximately one in every 1,000 babies in Scotland born with the condition. It occurs randomly at the point of conception in both males and females. As it is such a common feature of society in Scotland and throughout the world, it is important that groups such as Down's Syndrome Scotland be recognised as providers of essential services. As John Wilson pointed out, the work

that the organisation does in supporting families and individuals is commendable.

As its website points out, Down's Syndrome Scotland is a mere team of three, and they are in high demand. The number of inquiries that it has received has grown continually over the past financial year, with a 97 per cent increase and more than 400 inquiries from professionals. There have been a further 600 parent inquiries, which shows that parents are increasingly becoming aware that help is out there to ensure that they and their child receive the optimum level of support. The expertise and support that is delivered includes training sessions for support staff, teachers and health workers, provision for lectures and seminars, formal visits to schools to improve understanding, and on-going support groups for carers, children and parents.

That information is crucial because there are still many misconceptions about the nature of the disability and why it occurs. As John Wilson mentioned, Down's Syndrome Scotland points out in its fact sheet that

"Although the chance of a woman having a child with Down's syndrome increases with her age at the time of conception, 80% of children with Down's syndrome are born to women younger than 35".

So much of the service that is delivered is aimed at giving greater control to the individual and at helping them personally to understand the condition, so that they can manage it effectively throughout their lives. Improving the individual's ability to communicate verbally is a key part of that. Helen Hayes of Down's Syndrome Scotland points out that

"speech characteristics and poor short-term memory limits language learning. Their understanding tends to be better than their production of language, which can include stuttering and talking too fast."

The charity now runs a pilot scheme in Glasgow, where parents and carers can bring children to meetings and pick up new strategies for communicating more easily. That has a huge impact on the emotional wellbeing of both carers and children, and it improves their relationships. The charity also runs workshops across the country, where attendees are given a programme of five sessions with language development experts, which gives them the tools to identify the unique difficulties that their child faces.

In 2012 the United Nations recognised world Down's syndrome day on 21 March. The date is significant as it represents the three copies—March being the third month—of chromosome 21, which people with Down's syndrome have.

Down's Syndrome Scotland will this year—as it has done for the past several years—run its "do a dish for Down's syndrome" campaign, where

family, friends and co-workers meet and bring self-prepared food in a celebration of diversity. Over the years it has been successful in bringing people together and I am perfectly sure that Down's Syndrome Scotland will find the same enthusiasm in communities during this awareness week.

I welcome the motion and look forward to seeing further positive steps towards inclusion, both this year and every year until 2018, when the eyes of the world will again be on Glasgow.

17:20

**Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):** I add my voice to those who have congratulated John Wilson on lodging the motion, particularly as the debate is taking place at the start of UN world Down's syndrome awareness week.

I would be surprised if a single member in the chamber or anyone in the public gallery—or indeed in communities throughout Scotland—was unfamiliar with the condition known as Down's syndrome.

Despite being something that has always existed, and despite research by John Langdon Down in the mid-19th century, until relatively recently people with Down's syndrome were severely stigmatised. Indeed, they were often institutionalised and, in the extreme case of Nazi Germany, they were the victims of genocide.

Thankfully, times have moved on. I commend the fact that Down's Syndrome Scotland recently celebrated its 30th birthday. I congratulate the charity on the enormous support that it has provided across Scotland for people with Down's syndrome, their families and the professionals in the field.

Branches of Down's Syndrome Scotland stretch from Grampian to Tayside and Fife, from Edinburgh to central Scotland and across to the west and Ayrshire. Each local group is active in assisting individuals and families in their communities.

I was interested to read about the communication skills project, which is highlighted in the motion, which is assessed by the University of Strathclyde and is looking at ways to improve speech and language abilities in children as early as possible. As with so many areas in medicine and support services, early intervention is often the key to providing successful help for people with Down's syndrome to realise their potential. That is essential in the early years, when children need such support to improve their communication skills, which in turn will help them to learn at a faster rate.

Another area that requires greater emphasis—and one in which Down's Syndrome Scotland is

leading the way—is continuing professional development for professionals, such as teachers, health visitors and midwives. As the old adage says, one is never too old to learn new skills. By providing those tools through accredited courses, a greater understanding of Down's syndrome can be gained.

The time available to me this evening does not allow me to cover every aspect of the tremendous work that is undertaken by Down's Syndrome Scotland, but I would like to mention the subject of screening. Advances in this field have ensured that women and their partners have access to the appropriate information in terms of explaining the difference between screening and diagnosis and discussing the options available. Pre-diagnostic support for pregnant women to make them aware of the possibility of having a baby with Down's syndrome should be more widely available.

Similarly, there has to be postnatal care in hospital for parents of babies born with Down's syndrome. Such things as Down's Syndrome Scotland's baby packs in maternity units should be part of the overall level of support that is provided for parents who are made aware of their child's condition.

Thankfully, the number of terminations following a prenatal diagnosis of Down's syndrome has fallen in England and Wales. I do not have the figures, but I imagine that the trend would be the same in Scotland.

I want finally to touch on the involvement of people with Down's syndrome in culture and the media. I very much welcome the fact that actors with Down's syndrome—who are often very talented—now play roles in mainstream television programmes such as “Eastenders”, “Holby City” and “Upstairs Downstairs” and in films such as “Notes on a Scandal”. However, it has taken far too long to achieve such involvement. Culture should represent society and, given that people with Down's syndrome are obviously part of society, they should be playing a part in our media. Perhaps that is a key component of ending the stigma of Down's syndrome.

As a member for North East Scotland, I hope that Down's Syndrome Scotland's charity dinner—called Scotland with soul—in Aberdeen this Friday, which will include music, dancing, an auction and a raffle, is a great success.

I thank John Wilson again for bringing this issue to the chamber and I wish all those involved in Down's syndrome awareness week every success in raising awareness of this common condition and helping those affected achieve their full potential as equal and active members of Scottish society.

17:25

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I add my congratulations to John Wilson on creating the opportunity for us to debate this important subject.

It is particularly interesting that, when I was a youngster, if someone was a Down's child they were institutionalised or they stayed with their family; they were written off at the outset. The assumption was that there was nothing there worth worrying about. Now, in the modern age, we know that we have consistently underrated the potential of children with Down's syndrome. Indeed, it is worth looking at the range of achievements of many with Down's syndrome, which is probably nearly as great as it is for people without Down's syndrome. There is considerable overlap. Many people with Down's syndrome achieve at higher levels than many who have no measurable impairment of any kind, which is to be welcomed.

My mother was a visitor at the local psychiatric hospital, Stratheden hospital. Like many hospitals in the 1950s and 1960s, it had people in it who were there because they had been abandoned by their families, which included people with Down's syndrome. Each fortnight my mother took a couple of people from Stratheden out for tea, one of whom was a Down's syndrome patient. In the modern context "patient" is the wrong word, because being a patient means that you are being treated, whereas the reality was that the woman concerned had been dumped in an entirely inappropriate setting. We have to be very grateful for the changes that have meant that the way in which people with Down's syndrome are treated is now different.

Another difference is that when my mother did that, 50 years ago, someone with Down's syndrome might have reasonably expected to live into their 30s. Now very often they live into their 60s. That is great news, of course, but it can also be a source of worry that did not previously exist for parents. Children with Down's syndrome are living beyond their parents' lifespan and their parents quite properly have many concerns about their children's ability to survive independently in the world after they have departed it. However, if we diagnose and support children with Down's syndrome we can create an independent capability in them.

We have heard reference to people with Down's syndrome acting. The earliest example of that that I remember was in an episode of "A Touch Of Frost", the theme of which focused on society's inappropriate view of the capabilities of someone with Down's syndrome. I welcome the fact that the mainstream media is providing opportunities for people with Down's syndrome to be part of theatre

and also using theatre and television drama as a way of communicating widely to the world that Down's syndrome is not a lifetime incapacitation.

There are issues that we still need to take tent of. The English website on Down's syndrome suggests that 18 health conditions need to be monitored carefully throughout the life of a person with Down's syndrome.

Dr Milne has stolen my thunder about Aberdeen, so I will talk about Inverness instead. "Six Percent" is a combined book and photographic exhibition that Down's Syndrome Scotland has developed in partnership with photographer Graham Miller. It is running in Inverness for most of this month. The exhibition has quotes from families and illustrates the full and rich life that people with Down's syndrome can live.

I very much hope that we will all be able to go away from this debate with a better understanding of the potential of people with Down's syndrome and a preparedness to help those who are affected by it.

17:30

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** I, too, thank John Wilson for bringing this debate to the chamber during Down's syndrome awareness week. The debate helps to bring attention to not only the awareness week but the issue itself.

I am pleased that Down's Syndrome Scotland has recently celebrated 30 years of providing many essential services, support and information to people with Down's syndrome. As Mark McDonald and Malcolm Chisholm have pointed out, it is not the best-resourced organisation in Scotland and yet it provides an excellent service to the people who need it.

As every member has mentioned, many people with Down's syndrome can face immediate stigma as assumptions—wrong assumptions, in many cases—are made about their abilities. That is why we need to promote a positive image of people with Down's syndrome to the general public to help to get rid of that stigma and to create a more understanding environment so that people with Down's syndrome can reach their full potential.

Down's syndrome awareness week gives us the opportunity to raise awareness of Down's syndrome and to challenge myths surrounding the condition. It also gives us a chance to highlight the concerns of people with Down's syndrome and to ensure that those concerns are not forgotten.

I take the opportunity also to congratulate Down's Syndrome Scotland on its success with the communication skills project, which has been

mentioned. The project provides support to 84 families throughout Scotland, helping children with Down's syndrome to develop their communication skills and providing parents with the tools to support them.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving the lives of people with learning disabilities and their families and carers in Scotland. People with Down's syndrome make up 20 per cent of the learning disability population. I am therefore pleased that Down's Syndrome Scotland is an active member of the implementation group for "The keys to life", which is working to drive forward the recommendations of the strategy.

I am heartened by the genuine commitment of the group's members to improve the quality of life for people with learning disabilities by building on the foundations that we already have in place in Scotland—through "The same as you? A review of services for people with learning disabilities"—and to deliver services that will further improve lives through the implementation of "The keys to life" project.

Thirteen years on from "The same as you?", the principles that underpinned that policy of valuing people with learning disabilities are as relevant as ever. People with learning disabilities should have the opportunity to contribute to the communities in which they live, work and socialise.

People with learning disabilities tell us that, since "The same as you?" initiative was introduced, they have generally been more accepted and valued in their communities than ever before and they are now rightly seen as people who can contribute to Scottish society in numerous positive ways. I believe that those are the rights and freedoms that everyone should have and that the statutory agencies should be transparent in demonstrating how they respect and uphold human rights in all of their policies and practices. What people with Down's syndrome and learning disabilities need is information so that they know what their human rights are and how to exercise those rights.

Health is an important issue for people with Down's syndrome and learning disabilities, which is why much of the emphasis of "The keys to life" is on health. We need to know about the needs of people with learning disabilities. For example, we know that people with Down's syndrome experience higher prevalence and earlier onset—around 30 to 40 years younger—of dementia than the general population. That is why I am pleased that the national dementia strategy helps to diagnose those at risk.

The Scottish learning disabilities observatory has been commissioned to lead work in

partnership with NHS boards to improve data on people with learning disabilities. Not only has it committed to identify numbers of people with learning disabilities who have health needs; it is committed to helping us to improve health outcomes and address the unnecessary premature deaths of people with learning disabilities.

Having meaningful relationships is a priority for people with learning disabilities. Having the chance to make and sustain friendships and relationships is something that improves their wellbeing and quality of life. The evaluation of "The same as you?" tells us that only one third of those interviewed were able to name at least one close friend. That tells us that there is a need for people with learning disabilities to be given more opportunities to make and keep friends.

We are currently working in partnership with Equal Futures and other organisations. The "I'll be there" friendship event took place on 30 January 2014, with around 180 people in attendance. Further events will take place across Scotland during the rest of this year.

We are committed to helping people with learning disabilities who want to work. We know that only 25 per cent of people who have learning disabilities are in employment or training for employment. That is why we have funded the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability, including for people who have Down's syndrome, to lead on an initiative called project search, which offers a programme of work experience to students who have learning disabilities to improve their chances of employment.

We know that living an independent life is important to people who have Down's syndrome and other learning disabilities. This means having the same choice and control in their lives as other people and having the right help and support to be an active part of their community. Other policies, which are not solely directed at people who have learning disabilities, are also relevant, such as the opportunities for self-directed support, the legislation for which comes into effect next month. That legislation will give people who have Down's syndrome and learning disabilities more choice and control over their day-to-day lives.

I have only touched the surface of what can be achieved in the next 10 years. We all have to commit to the agenda of improving the lives of people who have learning disabilities and their families and carers in Scotland. We need to continue to reduce barriers and discrimination. We need to commit to ensuring that the aspirations of people who have Down's syndrome and other learning disabilities become real.

Down's syndrome awareness week will help us to realise how we can live in a Scotland that values people who have Down's syndrome and provides them with the opportunities to live in an equal society in which they are truly valued and properly respected. We look forward to continuing to work with Down's Syndrome Scotland and other learning disability organisations to drive this agenda forward. It is a critical ingredient in making Scotland a better place in tomorrow's world.

*Meeting closed at 17:37.*



Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

---

Available in e-format only. Printed Scottish Parliament documentation is published in Edinburgh by APS Group Scotland.

All documents are available on  
the Scottish Parliament website at:

[www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)

For details of documents available to  
order in hard copy format, please contact:  
APS Scottish Parliament Publications on 0131 629 9941.

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact  
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000  
Textphone: 0800 092 7100  
Email: [sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk)

e-format first available  
ISBN 978-1-78457-008-8

Revised e-format available  
ISBN 978-1-78457-025-5