

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

AFFORDABLE HOMES BILL

Second Sitting

Wednesday 29 October 2014

CONTENTS

Sittings motion agreed to.
Order of consideration agreed to.
CLAUSE 3 agreed to.
Committee adjourned.

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON – THE STATIONERY OFFICE LIMITED

£5.00

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Sunday 2 November 2014

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IN GENERAL COMMITTEES

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: † SIR ROGER GALE, MR JIM HOOD

- | | |
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| † Blackman, Bob (<i>Harrow East</i>) (Con) | † Morris, James (<i>Halesowen and Rowley Regis</i>) (Con) |
| † Brooke, Annette (<i>Mid Dorset and North Poole</i>) (LD) | † Nuttall, Mr David (<i>Bury North</i>) (Con) |
| † Bryant, Chris (<i>Rhondda</i>) (Lab) | † Pearce, Teresa (<i>Erith and Thamesmead</i>) (Lab) |
| † George, Andrew (<i>St Ives</i>) (LD) | † Raynsford, Mr Nick (<i>Greenwich and Woolwich</i>) (Lab) |
| † Gilmore, Sheila (<i>Edinburgh East</i>) (Lab) | † Rees-Mogg, Jacob (<i>North East Somerset</i>) (Con) |
| † Hilling, Julie (<i>Bolton West</i>) (Lab) | Watkinson, Dame Angela (<i>Hornchurch and Upminster</i>) (Con) |
| † Howell, John (<i>Henley</i>) (Con) | Kate Emms, <i>Committee Clerk</i> |
| † Kwarteng, Kwasi (<i>Spelthorne</i>) (Con) | † attended the Committee |
| † Lavery, Ian (<i>Wansbeck</i>) (Lab) | |
| † Lucas, Caroline (<i>Brighton, Pavilion</i>) (Green) | |
| † McVey, Esther (<i>Minister for Employment</i>) | |
| † Morris, Grahame M. (<i>Easington</i>) (Lab) | |

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 29 October 2014

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

Affordable Homes Bill

9.30 am

The Chair: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I have a few housekeeping matters before we proceed. First and foremost, Members will notice that there is a camera present. That is part of the filming for a documentary on the work of the House. The Chairman of Ways and Means and I have discussed this. It will be a fixed shot; I have been assured that the camera will not move around. I have given my consent that it may be present, which is apparently in my gift. I hope that the Committee will accept that.

Members will notice that a further amendment has been tabled. At the appropriate time, I shall ask Mr Rees-Mogg to move that amendment formally, so that the debate can embrace the substantive motion and the two amendments. That will be formal and not subject to debate. When we get to the amendment, Mr Rees-Mogg may wish to say more about it.

To begin this morning's proceedings, Mr Nuttall has the floor. Applying what I will term the Friday morning principle, I am likely to be minded to accept a closure motion once I believe that sufficient debate has been held. That will be on a cumulative basis, probably after two and a half or three hours, depending on how we go—or before, if nothing is happening. The hon. Member who has the floor needs to be aware that at least one other Member has indicated that he wishes to speak, which is why I chose to accommodate that. So long as he remains in order and does not become repetitious, he has the floor and it is entirely in his gift and his courtesy whether he allows a colleague to speak or whether he uses up the time available before a closure motion. I hope that is all clear.

Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): On a point of order, Sir Roger, I wish to bring the Committee's attention to remaining order 59, which would allow this Committee to

“send for persons, papers and records.”

I wonder whether we ought not to wait for the House to determine that before we continue the work of the Committee.

The Chair: The short answer to that is no. We have no power to wait until the House has determined it. It is entirely a matter for the House and not for the Committee. It is not the business before the Committee. The hon. Gentleman is entirely within his rights to table the necessary motions. That must be debated on a Friday morning by the whole House and voted upon by the whole House. The whole House takes that decision and we shall seek to accommodate that as swiftly as possible. As things stand, we have the motions on the order paper and nothing else.

Resumption of adjourned debate on Question (22 October),

That the Affordable Homes Bill Committee do meet on Wednesday 29 October at 9.25am and 2.00 pm, and thereafter on Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 9.25am and 2.00pm when the House is sitting.

Amendment proposed (22 October): (a), to leave out from “That” to end and insert

“the Affordable Homes Bill Committee do meet on Wednesday 5 November at 10.00 am, and thereafter on Wednesdays at 10.00am when the House is sitting.”—(*John Howell.*)

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment (b), to leave out from “meet” to “when” and insert

“at 2.30 pm on Fridays”.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): We concluded our proceedings last Wednesday with a few points of order. You indicated, Sir Roger, that you were minded to try to accommodate the views of the Minister and other Committee members who were trying to catch your eye. I want to make clear at the outset that I have no intention of using the allotted time. I am as keen as I am sure you, Sir Roger, and the rest of the Committee are to hear a range of views, and particularly the Minister's views.

I have a few points I wish to make before concluding my remarks. We were, as Members will recall, in the substantive part of my comments—as far as I was able to make progress with them—about the merits of sitting on a Tuesday or a Wednesday and whether it was appropriate to sit in the morning and in the afternoon. That highlights the problems that have arisen since the House changed its sitting hours so that instead of sitting at 2.30 pm on a Tuesday, as has previously been the case even during the short time that I have been in the House, in 2010, it now sits at 11.30 am, which makes it much more difficult for the work of Committees to be properly accommodated in the timetable of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne said that if the Committee was due meet on a Tuesday morning, it would clash with his membership of another Public Bill Committee, which seems somewhat strange. Of course, it is not just Public Bill Committees but Select Committees that are affected. I am conscious that at least one other member of this Committee serves on the European Scrutiny Committee, which meets on a Wednesday afternoon. As mentioned last week, three members of this Committee, including you, Sir Roger, serve on the Procedure Committee, which meets on a Wednesday afternoon. I am a member of that Committee and, personally, I would not find it the most convenient of times—I will put it as delicately and politely as that—to meet for a long period. I would have no difficulty in meeting for 55 minutes at 2 o'clock, but it seems unnecessary for the Committee to meet as often as is proposed in the motion. That ties up the remarks that I was making last week.

I will now deal with the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives when he moved the motion at 10.15 am last Wednesday. I say that I will deal with the argument, but it is my submission that little was put forward by way of convincing argument, bearing in mind that my hon. Friend was asking for the Committee

to sit on what can only be described as a very intensive basis—twice a day for two days a week—which would be an enormous time commitment for hon. and right hon. Members. His arguments to advance the cause of the sittings motion extended to some 10 lines—just eight sentences—in the *Official Report* of last week's proceedings. No explanation was given as to why, for example, it was considered appropriate that the first meeting should be on Wednesday 29 October. There was no attempt to explain, even in passing, why the Committee had been established as an 18-member, rather than a 16-member, Committee, or why it was necessary to sit twice on a Tuesday and twice on a Wednesday. Crucially, no explanation was given as to why the Committee had been formed and was asked to sit at all without a money resolution.

I am conscious, Sir Roger, that you have taken advice and agreed that the Committee should sit without a money resolution, but it seems that things have moved on since last Wednesday. There may have been some doubt in the minds of advisers and of Members serving on the Committee as to whether the Bill would receive one, but it now appears beyond doubt that it will not.

Jacob Rees-Mogg: I must disagree with my hon. Friend; it is not beyond doubt, it just seems unlikely at the moment. Governments can and do change their minds on these important issues, and it would be unfair for the Committee to feel that a certain decision had been made.

Mr Nuttall: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Perhaps I over-egged it slightly when I said it was beyond doubt. There was certainly further comment yesterday evening that indicated that those in charge of making Government decisions had reached a decision about that. Those reports may be inaccurate and, as my hon. Friend submits and as is often the case, Governments are quite capable of changing their minds. On that basis, it would be appropriate for the Committee to remain open-minded about the chances of the Bill ever receiving a money resolution. This morning, the chances of that happening seem far less than they did this time last week. Even then the hon. Member for St Ives, in moving the sittings motion, made no attempt to explain why it was necessary for the Committee to sit twice a week.

On Second Reading, the hon. Member for St Ives made it quite clear that he intended—I think I quote accurately from his website—to “beef up” the Bill in Committee. That the promoter of the Bill should bring it before the House for a Second Reading debate in the full knowledge that it did not contain the whole of his intentions, did not reflect what he wanted the House to determine and saying that he intended to “beef up” the Bill in Committee, seems a rather strange way of bringing forward any Bill.

It was surprising, therefore, that we heard nothing last week from the promoter of the Bill about his intentions in that regard. Is it still his intention to table further amendments to add the clauses that were in the initial draft of the Bill? Is it his intention that some clauses should be taken out of the Bill in order that it can proceed without requiring a money resolution? Either way, he was silent on those matters. I submit, therefore, that a case was not made as to why the Committee should sit twice on both Tuesdays and

Wednesdays, at 9.25 am and 2 pm. My preference, as I said last week, is that, if we are to sit at all—I have doubts about whether that is necessary—we should sit once a week, as proposed in the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley.

9.45 am

I do not intend to detain the Committee further this morning. I have made my views clear, and it is now the turn of others to do that so that the Committee can come to a decision. I will just say this: this is not an Affordable Homes Bill; it is a completely unaffordable homes Bill. I have attempted to explain that I think it is the most expensive private Member's Bill that has ever been brought before the House. In any other era, it would have been a Government Bill.

For that reason, it is completely inappropriate that the Committee should sit without the appropriate money resolution. It is a complete waste of right hon. and hon. Members' time that we should be considering a Bill when, as things stand, it has absolutely no prospect of making further progress. I accept that there is always a chance that the Government may change their mind on such matters, but without a money resolution it seems pointless to proceed further. If the Committee is to proceed, my preference is for us to sit once a week on a Wednesday morning, in accordance with my hon. Friend's amendment.

Jacob Rees-Mogg: It is a continued pleasure to be serving under your chairmanship this week, Sir Roger, as it was last week, and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North. Since we met last week, *tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*. Things have moved on; there is a change in the atmosphere. The great mind of Government—that impenetrable thing that is so difficult to understand or follow—seems to be stuck on this great issue of the money resolution for the Bill and whether that will come forward soon or late. We must bear in mind that the money resolution concerning the change to our clocks took 10 months to emerge from that great organ that leads the way we behave in this country and determines these issues for us.

Therefore, we must face this issue. Without the money resolution, considerable parts of the Bill cannot be discussed. Indeed, only one clause may be discussed at this stage, though I give notice to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives that I will table a question later today to the relevant Secretary of State to find out what the cost of clause 3 would be. If the cost were found to be more than £250,000, which would require a money resolution, but the Committee had passed it, the Bill would be bounced back by the Speaker as soon as it got to Report.

There is solid precedent for that. If a Committee inadvertently orders that a clause that required a money resolution should stand part of a Bill without that money resolution, the Bill goes back to Committee. I am sorry not to have tabled the question earlier; I would have done so late last night, but I was involved in intricate conversations with the Clerks concerning the Bill. However, in the absence of the answer to that question, to proceed to that clause, and therefore to set down the timetable before it is certain that the cost would not be more than £250,000, would be to take a risk.

[*Jacob Rees-Mogg*]

I want to talk about time.

“Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.”

We have an enormous amount of time set out for the Bill. It is proposed that we should sit four times a week. If we sit at 2 o'clock on a Tuesday or on a Wednesday, we could have the pleasure of going through the night until the following morning. We would not rise until shortly before the House sits on the following morning. I know it would be a great pleasure for all and sundry to hear the dulcet tones of Members of all parties—particularly for you, Sir Roger—but can it really be necessary to debate a Bill that has only one clause that we can currently discuss?

I have added my name to two amendments to the sittings motion. One suggests the normal sittings for this sort of Committee, at 10 o'clock on Wednesday, which is a convenient time as most people are likely to be here anyway for Prime Minister's questions. However, I tabled a second amendment following a conversation with the Chairman of Ways and Means. I hope he will not mind me repeating it. He said that he was concerned that he had put his two most brilliant Chairmen in charge of the Committee. He was worried about how much of their time would be used if we were to sit at great length and if it was unclear as to when we were sitting. It seemed to me that the ideal time to use these two great Chairmen was at 2.30 pm on a Friday, when no other business would be carried out.

The Chair: Order. Let me put the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest. The Chairman of Ways and Means and I have also discussed that. Mr Hood's time and mine is at the disposal of the House, as it always is.

Jacob Rees-Mogg: That is right, Sir Roger. The time is so valuable that it would be best if it were spread widely and generously, so that other Committees can have the benefit of it. I thought that 2.30 pm on Fridays would be a convenient time for all of us who will be here for other private Members' Bills. We could pop in at the end of the day and have a little discussion on this Bill. It may well be a little discussion, because once clause 3 has been dealt with there will be nothing to do other than adjourn the Committee.

I conclude by saying that the motion provides far too much time for discussing a Bill on which we can discuss only one clause. If the motion were passed, it would not surprise me if we did not later amend it to change the sittings that we would have. The two options provided in the amendments, one jointly with my hon. Friend the Member for Henley, would provide a much better use of time when there is only one clause to discuss.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I only wish our constituents were watching the debate. I really do. My constituents—I suspect all our constituents—have a deep-seated belief that the bedroom tax is unfair and affects the most vulnerable in our society. They may believe that some people have an argument to put to the House and to the Committee, namely that the bedroom

tax should remain in place. My constituents and all Opposition Members of the Committee would say that that argument is wrong. However, I do not think my constituents would accept that it is the right of hon. Members and the Government to frustrate the will of the House of Commons, which has been expressed clearly in a majority vote of the House in favour of the Bill going fully and properly into Committee.

A money resolution has not been tabled. We have heard from two hon. Members that they think that it is extremely unlikely, if not utterly improbable, that a money resolution will be tabled. That means that this matter will not be properly resolved. Frankly, I believe that that shows that the Government are like a very sad, tired old dog that needs to be put out of its misery. The truth of the matter is that most fair-minded constituents in this country, including Conservative constituents who want to tackle the deficit, the debt and this country's economic problems, would none the less conclude that it is not right for the Committee to debate debating ad infinitum and not debate the substantive issues.

We should get on with the Bill properly. If Members want to oppose it, let them vote down the Bill either in Committee or on the Floor of the House. Let them do that in honesty and fairness, but let them not seek to undermine the due process of the House, which is that if a private Member's Bill gets the approval of the House for Second Reading it goes into Committee. It is then allowed to proceed properly and fairly, without dilatory processes or filibustering, without people making ludicrous and vexatious points of order, or making speeches about matters that are of no business whatever and do not allow us to get on with the substantive matter. The truth of the matter is that two thirds—

Mr Nuttall: On that point—

Chris Bryant: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He has made a speech lasting the best part of an hour. If he could not get his points across in that speech, he will not be able to make—

Mr Nuttall: On a point of order, Sir Roger. Is it not the case that had I not kept my remarks purely to the matter in hand, you would have ruled me out of order? Anyone suggesting that I was dealing with extraneous matters cannot be correct.

The Chair: The hon. Gentleman is entirely correct to say that his remarks were in order. He is also correct in saying that had they not been I would have ruled him out of order. Where we have to part company, I am afraid, is that it is entirely in the gift of the Member who has the Floor as to whether he chooses to give way. The hon. Member for Rhondda has indicated that he is not willing to give way.

Chris Bryant: I will be ending my remarks shortly, I assure you, Sir Roger.

The honest truth is that the measure we are considering repealing to some extent—the bedroom tax, as we call it and as most fair-minded people in the country conclude it to be—we would prefer to repeal in its entirety. Two thirds of those affected by it are disabled people. People who have medical equipment and need to store it in a

second room are affected. People are dependent on discretionary awards by local authorities, with some local authorities granting generously and some not. In essence, the poor are paying for the sins of the rich in the City of London. That is why we believe that we should get on with a substantive measure and stop shilly-shallying.

The Minister for Employment (Esther McVey): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Sir Roger. I have listened to the various points of order, queries and unknown issues, all of which were incredibly relevant to what is happening today and in future sittings. We have to ask ourselves why we are in the position that we are in today, talking about the removal of the spare room subsidy and about affordable homes. What is this collective Opposition amnesia? They left this country with 1.8 million people on housing waiting lists, 400,000 in overcrowded homes and not enough houses being built since the 1920s—

Chris Bryant: That is not on the motion.

The Chair: Order. I will decide what is in order and what is not.

Esther McVey: We appeared to have two different systems in place, which the Opposition were happy to preside over. People in private rented accommodation who needed their house paid for by the state lived by one set of rules, but people in social housing lived by a different set of rules. That needed to be aligned—how could it carry on? Given the deficit and the debt, given that the Labour party had more or less brought the country to its knees, we had to ask how we were going to deal with all those factors. What would we do to ensure fairness for people, whether they were in social housing, private housing or in their own accommodation as taxpayers paying the bill for other people? That is what we had to deal with and it was probably one of the single most difficult issues to resolve. So many complex issues and problems were left by the Labour party, we had to say—

The Chair: Order. I have allowed the Minister to respond to the political points made by the Opposition Front Bencher, but it is now time that we moved back to the sittings motion.

Esther McVey: Thank you, Sir Roger, for allowing me that opportunity, because I felt the record had to be corrected, given what the hon. Member for Rhondda said. I also thought that Government Members were seeking clarity about whether the Bill could proceed. Their questions were all pertinent and relevant. I thought that it was only right for them to be heard, and I wanted to get that on the record.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): I will be brief in summing up the debate on the motion that I moved. Since then, clearly, we have heard and read in the press that the Government are not minded to provide or table the money resolution necessary for the Bill to proceed in the orderly and efficient manner that we had all looked forward to. That is a disappointment. In my view, it is an abuse of the privilege of executive power. It is remarkable that any Government can defy the clear

will of Parliament as they are apparently choosing to do. The vote on 5 September was unprecedented—an unprecedented defeat of the Government by 75 votes and an unprecedented turnout of right hon. and hon. Members taking part in the debate and the Division.

10 am

Esther McVey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew George: I will make the point first.

Esther McVey: And then will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew George: I will give way in a moment. The turnout for the vote and the level of interest in the debate were unprecedented. It is incumbent on any Executive, given the privilege of their power, to respect the pre-eminent democratic Chamber of this country and its decisions. The Government are apparently minded not to provide the money resolution and are choosing so to frustrate the decision of that pre-eminent Chamber. I will do my utmost to use every facility to encourage the Government to provide the money resolution. It is a travesty and the whole nation will find it remarkable that the Government can behave in such a manner.

Esther McVey: Talking about unprecedented behaviour and turning on a sixpence, I do not understand how only several days before something that was meant to be purely about affordable houses, which is the responsibility of the Department for Communities and Local Government, was swung around by the hon. Gentleman, who changed his idea and brought a completely different Bill before the House. That makes us question whether that was allowable in any shape or form. Will he explain how that happened two days before?

Andrew George: I am grateful to the Minister for highlighting the fact that I had been seeking the support of Government on clause 3, which in a much earlier draft was significantly extended beyond what I could hope to persuade the House and the Government to support in terms of developing the intermediate housing market. Clearly, it was unlikely. I took advice from a variety of sources and it was quite clear to me—this is the bottom line—that to achieve the best possible outcome for the thousands of families who are in desperate need of affordable housing, I needed to include in the Bill only those clauses that I thought stood the best chance of success. Of course, my original proposal was considerably more wide ranging, but after taking advice and seeking the support of a range of bodies and political parties I made a judgment, which is in my gift, to concentrate on those areas with which we have ended up in the Bill.

Esther McVey: I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman sought advice from various people, because at no stage did he ask me, the Minister in charge of the matter, whether we could discuss it. Equally, at no stage does there seem to have been a conversation with his Lib Dem colleague, the Minister for Pensions, whose brief it is, to see whether we could come to an amicable solution. The hon. Member for St Ives did not ask me, his Lib Dem colleague or the Department.

Andrew George: That is a most interesting intervention. Not only did I seek the advice of the Government, but I went to the Department I was told I should speak to, the Department for Communities and Local Government, which took the lead on the draft Bill at that stage. I was following the advice of the Government and Government Ministers, but in the debate on 5 September, a Minister claimed that the impact of the Bill would be a great deal more expensive than the savings the Government claimed would result from the introduction of the bedroom tax. I immediately sought the support of the Minister's Department in seeking advice on how to address that concern. I asked the Department to provide facilities and technical assistance to ensure that the Bill is not deficient in the way that the Minister indicated in his remarks on 5 September, but I have not even received a reply or an acknowledgment—

Esther McVey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew George: No, not at the moment. The Minister made a claim and she needs to understand. When she intervenes in a moment, I hope that she will apologise to the Committee and to me. The will of the House was clearly expressed on 5 September. It is perfectly reasonable for a Member who is introducing a Bill of this nature to seek the technical assistance and advice of a Department that will have to implement the legislation when the Bill ultimately becomes law. I find it surprising and, frankly, juvenile that a Department should refuse to respond at all to my request that we have a conversation about it in order to take it forward.

Esther McVey: Dearie dearie me, how history has been rewritten. The Bill was with the Department for Communities and Local Government for three or four weeks. As the hon. Gentleman has just said, he thought it was with a different Department. He pursued it via DCLG without realising that his own fellow Lib Dem, the Minister for Pensions, was in charge of the policy. The hon. Gentleman did not pursue the correct tack and did not understand where the Bill actually resided. He did not know which the correct Department was and did not know the correct procedure to follow—
[*Interruption.*]

The Chair: Order. I must ask hon. Members of all parties to observe the courtesies and to recognise the fact that each intervention is an intervention, not a speech.

Andrew George: Thank you, Sir Roger. I appreciate that. I did note that in the Minister's intervention she refused to apologise for the behaviour of her Department. I find it shocking that a Government should refuse—indeed, not even acknowledge—a reasonable request for technical assistance and advice.

Esther McVey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew George: No, I will not give way.

Esther McVey: I will not have the word “shocking”—

The Chair: Order. I say to the hon. Lady that if the hon. Gentleman who has the floor chooses not to give way, that is his decision.

Andrew George: I am allowed to use the term “shocking”. I would say that that is a rather mild expression, considering the way in which the Government have behaved—
[*Interruption.*]

The Chair: Order. It is inevitable in areas of political difference that Members will seek to score points and that Members on the other side of the Committee will seek to respond to those points. It is the duty of the Chair to try to be fair to both sides. One Member makes a political point and then another Member is likely to make a political point, but I remind the Committee that we have a limited amount of time and we are actually discussing the sittings motion. That applies to you, Mr George, as well as to everybody else. I have had an indication that at least one other member of the Committee wishes to speak.

Andrew George: Thank you, Sir Roger. I will certainly respect your advice and come back to the sittings motion, which I was referencing in my remarks. The key point is this: the motion makes it quite clear that, should the Committee wish to use it, there is a facility for up to four sittings in a sitting week. Of course, that does not oblige the Committee to take that up fully. I believe it is possible to consider and dispose of all of the business in the Bill in one sitting, but given that some right hon. and hon. Members clearly wish to explore matters further than anticipated, there is the facility of further sittings. The Committee is not obliged to use all of those sittings, should that come to pass. I urge the Committee to support the sittings motion.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Roger. I rise to speak briefly to add my voice to that of the hon. Member for Rhondda. Both this morning and last week, we have been witnessing a charade. Given the seriousness of the substance, many of our constituents watching this and in particular anyone who is affected by the bedroom tax will be disillusioned. Their worst impression of Parliament will be underlined by seeing the time-wasting going on here. This has shown Parliament and the Government at their worst. Playing games with a money resolution is a cowardly way to deal with the issue. If people do not agree with the measure, argue it out on its substance and the merits of the argument.

Jacob Rees-Mogg: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Caroline Lucas: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman had plenty of time to speak; I believe we have heard far too much from him. I agree with the hon. Member for St Ives that we could dispatch this much more swiftly. To waste everybody's time in such a complacent and indulgent way is incredibly irresponsible. I urge us to pursue this as fast as we possibly can.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 10.

Division No. 1]

AYES

Blackman, Bob
Howell, John
McVey, rh Esther

Morris, James
Nuttall, Mr David
Rees-Mogg, Jacob

NOES

Brooke, rh Annette	Lavery, Ian
Bryant, Chris	Lucas, Caroline
George, Andrew	Morris, Grahame M. (<i>Easington</i>)
Gillmore, Sheila	Pearce, Teresa
Hilling, Julie	Raynsford, rh Mr Nick

Question accordingly negated.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Affordable Homes Bill Committee do meet on Wednesday 29 October at 9.25 am and 2.00 pm, and thereafter on Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 9.25 am and 2.00 pm when the House is sitting.

10.15 am

Andrew George: I beg to move,

That consideration of Clauses 1 and 2 be postponed till after consideration of Clause 3.

As the Committee is aware, the Government are not currently minded to provide a money resolution. It is therefore logical and reasonable that we debate those parts of the Bill that we can debate. That clearly commences with clause 3. Clause 3 sets up a review of the operation of the intermediate housing market, something that many hon. Members are concerned about. There is a major opportunity here for a review of what some people describe as the construction of a lower rung on the housing ladder for the thousands upon thousands of families who are caught betwixt and between the constraints of the rental sector and their inability to get their toes on the first rung of the owner-occupied sector. It is perfectly reasonable in the circumstances in which we find ourselves to debate the merits of clause 3. I am sure that the Committee will rapidly be persuaded that it should stand part of the Bill and it is logical for us to consider it first.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3

REVIEW OF THE AVAILABILITY OF AFFORDABLE HOMES
AND THE INTERMEDIATE HOUSING MARKET

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Andrew George: Clause 3 calls on the Secretary of State to commence a review of the availability of affordable homes and the operation of the intermediate housing market and to produce a report which should be laid before Parliament. Crucially, it highlights the fact that the Secretary of State should review the need for affordable homes in the intermediate market and any impediments to meeting that need. My experience of this market goes back to the period immediately before I was elected to the House. I was working in the field and seeking to find methods to construct affordable homes—shared ownership homes and shared equity homes, but mainly shared ownership homes.

There are other products in the market such as mutual housing and discounted initial sale properties to help people who are struggling because of the exorbitant

and, some might say, extortionate rents that are often charged in the private rented sector. A disproportionate amount of their income, as they see it, is simply thrown down the drain and they get no benefit from their expenditure in the form of a return on their investment as do the many people who are owner-occupiers, which puts them at a financial disadvantage. It is a cause of significant poverty among those who are seeking to get on in life.

There have been a number of initiatives over the years, including alterations to planning regulations, for example, such as the one that permits local planning authorities to make an exception to normal planning policy. The local authority is allowed to say that although it would not normally give planning permission for housing on a particular site it will permit, as an exception, a development to meet the affordable housing needs of local people in that community. In such circumstances, it is important that we review how that planning policy is proceeding and whether there are impediments to achieving developments of the type that I would think Members from all parties would wish to encourage.

A further impediment to the shared ownership sector is the difficulty experienced by many providers of affordable homes, particularly registered social landlords and charitable housing associations. In bringing forward their developments, they do not always get the support from lenders that they initially anticipate. We are going back some 30 or 40 years to a time when these products were first brought on to the market. As far as I am aware—this must be pursued in the review—currently only two lenders are lending in the intermediate housing market for shared ownership: Halifax and Nationwide. Even though those two lenders are prepared to lend to those with a share in a property in the shared ownership sector, they remain remarkably diffident about continuing to provide finance to the sector.

Some right hon. and hon. Members may be aware from cases in their constituencies, but I think that many people are unaware, that although the initial occupants of properties developed by housing associations are able to purchase a property with the association's assistance, they often find that they are unable to sell it, because at that point the restrictions that properly apply to the ownership of the property—who can buy it from them—mean that no other lender will provide the necessary finance to the potential purchaser.

We have a lot of anecdotal evidence about what is going on in the shared ownership market, but the great benefit of the review is that it would provide the evidence necessary to guide future Government policy. I think I have indicated previously that I would like to introduce—

Mr Nuttall: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew George: Just a moment. I am going to address a point made earlier by the hon. Gentleman, so he might wish to intervene after I have made it. Of course I would prefer the Government to introduce legislation to provide the tools to enable the intermediate housing market to flourish, and I am keen to talk to Ministers to find ways to introduce such tools. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman wishes to ask what type of tools I am thinking of; if that is the line down which he wishes to travel, I am happy to give way to him.

Mr Nuttall: That is not why I wanted to intervene. I would merely like to ask my hon. Friend whether or not he has seen the information released by the Department for Communities and Local Government. He said that there is only anecdotal evidence, but in fact the statistical release on the affordable housing supply is packed full of facts and figures, not anecdotal evidence.

Andrew George: I am fully aware of those statistics, but they are debated and disputed in the sector itself. We do not only have facts and figures for the properties that are currently in shared ownership or are shared equity properties or mutual housing, and for the development of community land trusts and the properties being developed in that way. We are also able to scrutinise the extent to which the properties currently being brought forward for shared ownership are being brought forward by private providers in certain circumstances or by charitable housing associations. All that information is known.

The issue is that we need to go a little further. That is why I would encourage the Government to hold this kind of review. We have the basic facts and figures for what is happening on the ground. We need to analyse and fully understand how we enhance this sector. Of course we can review the facts and figures, but we need a much more considered and detailed review of the dynamics of what is going on in the sector, rather than the simple, bald facts.

In constituencies such as mine, we have had for decades a situation in which the mismatch between average earnings and the lowest rung on the housing ladder is stratospheric. The difference is enormous. Those are the circumstances at present in my west Cornwall and Isles of Scilly constituency, and I am sure that that is increasingly the case in more and more constituencies across the country. It has certainly been the case since the late 1970s. In the '60s and '70s, a couple, say a nurse and a teacher, might automatically have anticipated that they would be able to become owner-occupiers by going to a building society or other lender to provide the finance for them to take out a mortgage and purchase a property in a location such as mine, whereas now such a couple cannot get into the sector.

The issue is how we change the tools and facilitate circumstances in which young professionals are able to get into the market. It is important that the Government undertake the kind of review that I am describing because we need to concentrate Government attention and focus on a significant cohort of people who are disfranchised, as they are unable to get on and cling to the lowest rung of the housing ladder. That explains the importance of properly understanding how the sector works and how Government can, as a result of the review, address the lack of tools and the lack of capacity—the lack of available properties in the sector. It is all very well people talking about building more homes. There is a rather absurd, macho bidding war between political parties about who will build the largest number of houses a year. That is a rather pointless, nil-sum-game argument, in my view. The question is what types of housing we are building.

Let us take, for example, my part of the world. The housing stock in Cornwall has more than doubled in the past 40 years, yet the housing problems of local

people have become significantly worse over that period, so we can conclude—it is a rather broad-brush conclusion—that simply building homes is not the answer to the problem. We need a more sophisticated method.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman see the issue raised by this clause complementing some of the other issues that he will want to raise in due course? One effect of the situation that he is describing is the growth in the housing benefit payments bill. Often, that is now for people who are in work but who increasingly have to claim benefit because of the high cost of rent in relation to their earnings. That is vastly outstripping the savings that have been achieved by measures such as the bedroom tax.

10.30 am

Andrew George: That should be part of the review instigated by the Secretary of State. Without undertaking a comprehensive review such as the one I am proposing, it is difficult to assess the beneficial impacts on the welfare budget of developing and encouraging the sector. The hon. Lady makes a good point.

To return to the point that I was making, in many parts of the country, communities are not nimbys and do not resist development. In Cornwall, as I have said, the housing stock has more than doubled in 40 years. Successive Governments have argued that by building houses, the housing needs of local people would be resolved like magic, because of the equilibrium in the market between demand and supply; as supply went up, price would come down to a level affordable for local people. That has not happened, however, even where communities have accepted that rather two-dimensional mantra. If anything, prices have been going in the opposite direction in spite of high levels of housing development.

That is why it is vital to expand the work of Government in the intermediate market that we need in some parts of the country, primarily in the south of these islands, where the intensity of market pressure is greatest and the mismatch between earnings levels and house prices is most significant. The Government must provide the facility whereby local authorities and communities, working with the charitable registered social landlord sector, can construct a new, lower rung on the housing ladder for the thousands of people, particularly young families, who are struggling in the inadequate and extortionate private rented sector. We are giving young families the worst start in life because of the dysfunctional housing system, hence my view that it is all the more important that clause 3 stand part of the Bill. I hope that it will become a vehicle whereby a future Government—clearly, the proposals will not be implemented by the current one—can roll up their sleeves and get started on delivering the policies, tools and investments that are necessary properly to support the intermediate market and the affordable housing market. I urge the Committee to support the clause.

Chris Bryant: Mr—Sir Roger, sorry. I have been abandoning your knighthood, and I apologise. Who can doubt that the clause is an essential part of what Government and Parliament should be doing at the moment? There is a massive problem surrounding affordable

housing. We do not have to knock on many doors—whether in Rochester and Strood or in any other constituency in the land—to know that the gap between people’s earnings and the cost of their rent or mortgage is growing. Last week, the Lyons commission also added to many young people’s sense of frustration. There is an ongoing collapse in the affordable and intermediary housing market. We now have the lowest level of house building since the 1920s.

I do not want just to condemn the Government; I want to say that in government we did not get everything right on housing, and there are clearly problems with the housing market across the country. It cannot be right that we merely rely on anecdote, which the hon. Member for St Ives mentioned. We need proper, evidence-based policy making in this country, rather than policy-based evidence making, which is sometimes all too evident with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

The housing market, particularly the affordable housing market, is important to so many other elements of the economy, particularly the labour market. Can someone afford to move from an area where houses are cheap but where there are few jobs, such as my constituency in the Rhondda, to areas where there are many jobs but where houses are very expensive? That is a key issue for the national health service and for nearly all key workers and manual labourers. There is a real danger that unless we address this, many of our big cities will become the same as Paris, a city with rich people living in the middle who are entirely dependent on their many employees, who live many miles outside. That pattern of home ownership and of division between rich and poor is unsustainable in France, and I would not want to see it brought into this country.

Of course we must address the issue of affordable housing in this country, and a proper review is needed because there are many different patterns across the country. The north has a different experience from the south. The south-east has a particular set of issues. I would argue that the Medway towns, where I have spent a lot of time recently—more time than Conservative MPs as far as I can see—have a particular set of issues. Migration within the United Kingdom, the ability of people to move readily and easily from areas where they might be able to afford to buy a home to areas where they may have to rent, is also an issue. Affordable housing is an area where successive Governments have not got everything right. There is a natural tendency for people to oppose developments in their area, even though they know it is in the long-term interests of their children and their children’s children to have enough homes for people to live in. For all those reasons, we need more than anecdote; we need facts. That is why I believe that clause 3 needs to stand part of the Bill.

Esther McVey: One point on which we all agree is that the country needs affordable homes, which is why the Government are doing so much not only to rebalance the economy, but to turn the great northern cities into a powerhouse by getting more money, more industry, more infrastructure and greater transport up there. That is what the Government are doing, which is why we have introduced the regional growth fund and the local enterprise partnerships. Those are all things we are doing to stabilise the economy and improve infrastructure. We have looked at how to facilitate planning to make it

possible for there to be more homes where they are needed, but we are also considering the requirements of local areas so that people believe the place has the right feel. Of course we have to do that.

We must also unlock buildings that have fallen into a state of disrepair. How do we bring them back into use? That is why we are unlocking those sites to get builders building, and it is why we have put £1 billion into unlocking 250,000 homes by 2020. Equally, it is why we have put £0.5 billion into the “Get Britain Building” campaign. Those are the things that we are doing to ensure that we have the right infrastructure and the right homes across the country.

The hon. Member for Rhondda is right to say how little was done under his Government to build homes and have a clear strategy. That is why we are correcting that and moving forward with initiatives for the national planning policy framework, a housing strategy, unlocking sites and buildings that need to be brought back into repair, our Growing Places fund, the Get Britain Building fund, and the regeneration of large housing estates. All of those will be locally led with the support of central Government. We all agree with the principle of affordable homes and we need to proceed with it.

Mr Nick Raynsford (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I draw attention to my interests as declared on the Register. I made it clear in my contribution on Second Reading that I very much welcome the clause because it is about an element in the overall provision for housing need that holds great potential for people who traditionally have had difficulty accessing housing because they are not eligible for council housing or housing association social rented housing, or because they simply do not have the means to buy outright.

There is a long history, as the hon. Member for St Ives highlighted, of the intermediate market seeking to produce products that will provide housing options for those who are squeezed between what have traditionally been the two main sources of housing. Those initiatives go back 40-odd years and I recall being involved with helping some of them into existence. They have been necessary and contributed to meeting housing need but there has always been a difficulty, partly because no single product has emerged that has had a simple, clear appeal to the public which would make it possible for people to feel confident that it is an appropriate tenure to take.

The range, variety and complexity of many of the models have been, frankly, baffling to many members of the public who have not been able to understand the fine distinctions between shared ownership, shared equity, intermediate housing, low-cost home ownership guaranteed by covenants rather than subsidy, and a variety of other models. Therefore, there is a strong case for a review of the whole range of options to see which models are most likely to be successful and can most effectively meet needs, and to look at the different demands for subsidy, covenants and other mechanisms to ensure that such homes remain available to future generations. That is a difficult issue because we seek to keep property affordable for the future—that is referred to in the definition of affordable homes in clause 5, which I will not stray into, but refer to because it is a definition of a term used in clause 3.

[Mr Nick Raynsford]

The question of how to retain homes at below-market price in perpetuity poses real difficulties for individuals who wish to sell a low-cost home-ownership home and find someone who is eligible to buy, fits within the covenant requirements and can afford to purchase it. There has been a lot of discussion about the possible need for a revolving fund or some additional resource to assist providers of housing, such as housing associations, to finance the repurchase of such properties and keep them in use and available to meet the needs for which they were intended. That is another issue that would need to be looked at in the course of the review, which is why I welcome the clause.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I note the right hon. Gentleman's tremendous knowledge and experience in housing. Would he agree that a problem is that Governments have traditionally given registered social landlords grants, which are treated as loans by those landlords, and it is therefore difficult for them to raise additional finances to build the houses that my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives would like to see built?

Mr Raynsford: Registered social landlords have come a long way in the 150 years since Peabody was first established. I am not going to bore the Committee by going into that long history. There are technical issues about the treatment of grant and the overall financial position of a housing association if it has, as most have in recent years, become more dependent on borrowings from the private sector to ensure that it is viable and has the finance to continue to fund its activities. One issue I was seeking to highlight was the problem of refinancing the transfer of a low-cost home-ownership product from one person with an income below the necessary level for outright home ownership to someone else, without making it impossible for the occupier to sell their property. That would trap them in a home that might be inappropriate if they needed to move because of employment or a change in family circumstances. There is a technical issue with how to provide finance in a cost-effective way to make possible such movement within that intermediate market. I was simply arguing that that issue needs to be addressed as part of the review.

10.45 am

Andrew George: In relation to clause 3—the right hon. Gentleman referred to its association to clause 5, which we cannot debate—I want to emphasise that we must ensure that the review incorporates a review of retaining the integrity of the kind of permissions that underlie the in-perpetuity benefit that we seek to achieve. In rural areas especially, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to resolve that need. That benefit must not be lost by any slackening in the regulations that apply.

Mr Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. This is a technically difficult issue—how we ensure the maintenance of properties in perpetuity, while allowing people who want to acquire a greater equity share to do so. In some cases, there is an absolute bar on staircasing—the process by which people with a shared ownership stake can buy an ever-larger stake and ultimately buy the home outright. That inevitably

makes it unavailable for other people on modest incomes who cannot afford outright home ownership at full market prices. Restrictions on staircasing have applied in certain cases, but there are other mechanisms by which the in-perpetuity provision can be secured. I think particularly of models that restrict sales to people whose income falls within certain limits. That does not make it impossible for individuals to sell, but it does mean that sales are restricted to those whose incomes are defined. For example, under the Mayor's housing plan in London, there is an income limit for people seeking to acquire low-cost home-ownership options. That is a way in which those homes can be kept available for people in need who cannot afford outright home ownership.

This is complex territory, and it is important that there is a thorough review to examine all the options. There is absolute confusion about the terms “affordable home” and “affordable rent”. I am afraid that that is a product of the present Government's changes in policy. The present Government have put their focus on what they call an affordable rent product. That product is defined as below market rent but rents are up to 80% of market rent. In my constituency of Greenwich and Woolwich in London, market rents are in the region of £400 to £500 a week in certain parts; 80% of that—£300-plus or £400-plus—is clearly not affordable to people on modest incomes. The only way it could be affordable would be by high dependence on housing benefit, which would be contrary to one of the Government's other objectives: reducing housing benefit expenditure.

We have a rather bizarre situation where one arm of Government is saying, “We want products to be produced at the affordable rent level of up to 80% of market rent,” which inevitably means higher rents and greater benefit dependency. Meanwhile, another arm of Government is saying, “Housing benefit expenditure must be cut.” This is all relevant to the Bill because the bedroom tax is one of the housing benefit expenditure cuts made by the Government. We see the consequences of an incoherent Government policy.

Esther McVey: Could the right hon. Gentleman tell us how it was that housing benefit doubled in cash terms under Labour but, at the same time, the number of affordable rented homes fell by 420,000?

Mr Raynsford: If the right hon. Lady looks at the figures, she will see that that is not the correct position. [Interruption.] I will come on to the figures in detail. Housing benefit expenditure has increased consistently since housing benefit was introduced in 1982-83. It has gone up under Governments of all persuasions, generally for the good reason that it makes it possible for people to occupy housing that they otherwise could not afford because the rent is too high.

The interesting thing that the right hon. Lady should ponder is the ever-increasing number of households in work who have become dependent on housing benefit to meet the cost of their rent.

Esther McVey rose—

Mr Raynsford: The right hon. Lady asked a question and I was trying to give her an answer by pointing out that housing benefit expenditure has continued to rise

and the present Government have not stopped that rise. Current housing benefit expenditure is now of the order of £24 billion, which is higher than when the present Government came into office, despite the deep cuts that have been made in benefit entitlement. I ask her to recognise that the pattern of increased expenditure is a long-term one, irrespective of party.

As far as housing output is concerned, if the right hon. Lady looks at the figures she will see that when the Labour Government came into office it inherited a programme level of about 120,000 to 130,000 new homes being built a year. That increased in 2007 when 170,000 homes were started, so there was a rising trend in new housing provision. Obviously, when the recession hit in 2008 there was a serious fall, but over the duration of the Labour Government an average of something in the order of 145,000 to 150,000 new homes were added every year.

If the right hon. Lady looks at the record of this Government, she will see that the number of new homes being started is around 100,000 a year. It fell below 100,000 a year and is now recovering, but it is very much lower than the average achieved during the period of the previous Labour Government. I ask her to be accurate in the statistics about house building that she puts to the Committee.

Esther McVey: That did not answer how, under the previous Government, the rent bill went up—doubled—in the 10 years, but at the same time, the number of rented houses had fallen by 420,000. That question went unanswered. The right hon. Gentleman made the point, as did another member of the Committee, that there were now more people in work, but getting support from housing benefit. That is correct because perhaps only a year ago those people would not have been in work. We have seen a record number of people now getting into work, but they will remain in the same house. They are in social rented accommodation and they are now in a job, which is part of the journey that they are on. They are now progressing and moving forward—*[Interruption.]* That is obviously something that the Opposition do not understand. Those people are on a journey and in a job, but, of course, in the same accommodation that they were in only a few months ago.

Mr Raynsford: The right hon. Lady should reflect a little bit about the implications of low pay. She may be aware that many people are extremely troubled by their living standards and coping with the cost of higher rent at a time when their pay is not rising. In many cases they have to cope with very low standards of living.

Julie Hilling (Bolton West) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a disgrace that at least 30% of people using food banks are currently in work? They are unable to buy food let alone pay their rent.

Mr Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes a good point. There are so many sad indications of the consequences of people facing real hardship and difficulty, and the higher take-up of housing benefit is one of those.

I do not wish to detain the Committee by going on much longer, but I want to make a point about the clarity of the role of rented housing. First, what is the

appropriate role for social rented housing? It has been sadly reduced during the lifetime of the Government. How can we ensure a good supply of truly affordable social rented housing, provided by councils and housing associations for people who need rented housing at an affordable price?

Secondly, how do we help support intermediate housing provided by councils, housing associations and possibly the private sector at below market levels to meet the intermediate rented market? Thirdly, how do we continue to encourage the growth of private renting and bring more institutional and responsible investment into the market, to ensure the provision of high-quality rented housing that is kept in good condition, so that tenants can be guaranteed a good-quality home?

There are interesting issues about the relationship of the three parts of the rented sector. That, again, should be part of the review. For those reasons, I strongly support the view expressed in clause 3, that there should be a review of the availability of affordable homes and the intermediate housing market. I hope that the Committee will endorse and agree the clause.

The Chair: It is entirely up to Members, but I am required gently to remind the Committee that we have to adjourn at 11.25 am.

Caroline Lucas: Thank you, Sir Roger. I, too, think the clause is incredibly important. Affordable housing is a priority for the country including my constituency. I want to underline that when I talk about affordable housing, I do not share the Government's view that 80% of market rent is affordable. That makes a travesty of the meaning of affordable for so many people who are in difficult situations.

In Brighton, for example, the average house price is £244,000. That is 5% higher than the previous all-time high reached before the recession in 2007. That means that the gap now between Brighton and the rest of England stands at a staggering 45%. There are 18,000 people are on the council waiting list. That leads me to say that, in terms of the tools at our disposal, we should look at lifting the borrowing cap to allow councils to build homes again. They should be able to borrow against their assets; that makes good economic sense. It would certainly mean that they could build far more homes than they have so far.

Research from the National Housing Federation last week showed that the south-east as a whole faces a housing shortfall equivalent to the size of Birmingham over the next 20 years. I appreciate it is an interested view, but I would like to talk about London and the south-east for a moment because that is where my constituency is. One problem is the sense that London and the south-east have been used by successive Governments as the economic powerhouse for the rest of the country. As a result, so much pressure is put unfairly on that part of the country. It is unsustainable for people living in London and the south-east, but it is also not fair to people living in the north where some areas are crying out for investment.

With regard to the proposals in clause 3, I want to underline the role of housing co-ops. I am not sure whether the term intermediate housing would cover the

[Caroline Lucas]

role of co-operatives. I have met a lot of people in my constituency who have exciting ideas about how the nuclear family is being replaced by families of friends. Some people are forced to share but there are people who would like to do it. I was particularly struck by some older people, who might be rattling around in a large home on their own. They do not want to go into an institutional home but would like to live with friends. Anything we could do to help them achieve that kind of benefit would free up their homes. That would be good for the housing market and the economy. It would also be good for people's health in old age if they lived in that kind of community.

I hope that under clause 3 we can look at some imaginative ways to enable more people to free up existing homes, as well as create more homes.

Sheila Gilmore: As the hon. Lady said, not everybody necessarily wants to live in a group. What prevents some older home owners from moving to a smaller home is a lack of finance to meet the financial gap that may exist if they live in a flat. In my city they cannot always afford one on a ground floor. Mechanisms such as shared ownership and shared equity could help that age group as well, as they are not just about getting people on the housing ladder. It would allow some of the movement in the property market that everybody wants to see.

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Lady encapsulates the point I want to make. This set of measures could help everybody in the housing market, not just those trying to get on to the first rung of the ladder, important though that is. If we could also tackle that finance shortage for older people, we could free up more space and homes to benefit everybody.

To conclude, because I appreciate time is short, I hope that clause 3 can be quite imaginative in the kind of measures that it looks at. It can take a bit longer, if people come together to have a shared home, to get the finance and arrangements together than if a private developer bids on a home. I wonder whether we can look at some of the legislation on assets of community value, which gives the community a bit of breathing space so that private developers are prevented from making an immediate bid. That gives the community a bit of time to purchase an asset of community value. I appreciate that not all homes are ACVs, but the same kind of imaginative thinking could help us give a bit of a breathing space to allow less conventional arrangements to have a role in the marketplace, as well private developers. I support the clause.

11 am

The Chair: To wind up the debate, I call Mr George.

Andrew George: Thank you, Sir Roger. It has been a good debate and it has demonstrated why the clause is vital. It was not clear from the Minister's response whether the Government oppose the clause, but nevertheless the debate demonstrates that there is a vacuum of activity, or at least that the activity that exists—good and encouraging though it is—is rather piecemeal.

It therefore needs to be brought together in the kind of review proposed in the clause. I encourage the Committee to support that the clause stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The Chair: I invite the hon. Gentleman in charge of the Bill to move the Adjournment until it is procedurally possible for the Committee to sit again. I will explain that if he would be kind enough to move.

Andrew George: On a point of order, Sir Roger. I have not had any communication with regard to the next stage. It appears that the Government are currently not minded to table a money resolution, which would enable us to proceed with the remaining clauses of the Bill. It appears from the statements that have come out that that is not for reasons of protecting public finance, but for rather narrow, tribal reasons. In view of that, could you advise the Committee as to how we might proceed in the coming days or, indeed, weeks, should a facility be found, to cause the Government to change their mind so that the Committee can proceed in an orderly fashion?

The Chair: I will do my best. Procedurally, we have now reached the point where we must adjourn because the Committee cannot consider any further clauses unless and until there is a money resolution. The hon. Gentleman is therefore asking a hypothetical question to which I do not have an answer. Although the rumour mill may be milling to its heart's content, there is no formal indication before the House of how, when and if the Government now intend to proceed. If the hon. Gentleman moves the motion to adjourn, before I adjourn the sitting I will explain what I believe will happen.

Chris Bryant: On a point of order, Sir Roger. Could you confirm that the last time a private Member's Bill was not granted a money resolution was the Zoo Licensing (No. 2) Bill in 1981? Could you also confirm that, if the Committee so wished, it would be possible, instead of resolving that we have considered the Bill, to report to the House that we have considered that part of the Bill that we are unable to report?

The Chair: The answer to the first question is that the hon. Gentleman is correct, so far as I am aware. I was in the House at the time, but I cannot say it is seared on my memory. The answer to the second question is no. That is not possible procedurally. At this stage we are not reporting anything at all.

I would like the hon. Member for St Ives to move the motion to adjourn until such a time as it is procedurally possible for the Committee to sit again. All he must do is say, "I beg to move".

Andrew George: I feel, Sir Roger, like someone at a wedding ceremony repeating the words of the clergy. I beg to move that the Committee be now adjourned until a point at which it is procedurally possible to sit again.

I beg to move, That the Committee be now adjourned.

The Chair: Before I put the question to the Committee, let me clarify the position. We have now reached as far as we can go for the moment. For the benefit of all present, procedurally the next possible sitting for the Committee will be the first sitting that is in agreement with the timetable motion that the Committee passed this morning and that is after the House has passed a

money resolution. So it is the money resolution plus however many days, and then the notice will go out and the Committee will sit again.

Question put and agreed to.

11.5 am

Sitting adjourned.

