



Backbench Business Committee

Transcript of meeting

Tuesday 27 October 2015

Representations made before the Backbench Business Committee on Tuesday 27 October 2015

Members present; Ian Mearns (Chair), Bob Blackman, Mr Philip Hollobone, Gavin Newlands, Mr David Nuttall and Jess Phillips.

Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, Stephen Kinnock and David Warburton; Helen Goodman; Margaret Ritchie, Jim Shannon, Melanie Onn, Calum Kerr and Richard Arkless; Philip Davies; Tania Mathias, Zac Goldsmith and Ruth Cadbury made representations.

Questions 1-44

Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, Stephen Kinnock and David Warburton made representations.

Q1 Chair: Thank you for coming along, and welcome to this meeting of the Backbench Business Committee. We are here to listen to bids from Members of Parliament for time in the Chamber and in Westminster Hall to discuss various subjects. First, we have Stephen Kinnock and David Warburton—obviously, you are not David Warburton. We have Stephen Kinnock and Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh.

Stephen Kinnock: Thank you very much, Chairman. I would like to lay out the case for having a debate on the British Council. I declare an interest: I worked for the British Council for 11 years, which included postings in Brussels, St Petersburg and Sierra Leone. The British Council plays an absolutely critical role in the UK's overall foreign effort. It complements what we do in DFID and the FCO through strong people-to-people diplomacy. That manifests itself through education programmes, development programmes, English language teaching, management of exams and cultural programmes. It is really about winning friends and influencing people for the UK overseas, and there is no better time for that to be happening.

It is also worth mentioning that the British Council is a very lean organisation, commercially. It generates by far the largest part of its revenue through commercial activities such as English language teaching and managing exams, so it delivers great value for money for the British taxpayer,

with a relatively small grant in aid. It multiplies its revenue a lot through all the commercial work it does.

There are great opportunities for moving forward with key countries such as China, India and many of the African countries that are really growing now and are new markets for the UK, so there is a very strong economic case for it. It seems to have been a long time since there was a debate on the role of the British Council and of soft power more broadly. I understand that a number of MPs support the idea of having a debate, so I petition you to let us have one.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: I declare an interest: I was recently on a British Council trip to Pakistan. I echo all of the remarks made, because I have seen at first hand the respect the British Council commands on the world stage. To have access to Government officials and diplomats in a country such as Pakistan, which is facing many difficulties, was very important for us as Members of Parliament. That access was available, and we had an audience of many important people, which allowed us to make some very important points about our own relationship with Pakistan. In terms of renewed diplomacy efforts, in troubled times there is no greater way of making friends and developing a greater understanding of each other's cultures, religions and countries than people-to-people contact, and the British Council excels in ensuring that contact is made. It is a timely and important debate.

Q2 Chair: I know you have not heard what has been said, but is there anything you particularly want to add, Mr Warburton?

David Warburton: Sorry to be late. It will be a very useful debate, particularly at this time, when there are strategic issues around security at the edges of Europe. The work that the British Council does there is transformational. The House really ought to debate this, particularly in the light of the Foreign Affairs Committee report that came out last week, which highlighted the importance of the British Council's work in terms of security and of making sure its budget does not get cut. It is time to debate it properly.

Q3 Chair: There is a 90-minute slot in Westminster Hall on Tuesday 10 November. In that week the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is on duty to answer a debate, so if you were offered that slot could you take it? It would be much more useful to take a slot when the appropriate Department is on duty to answer. I am not saying that you are going to get it. You have made a bid, and the Department is available; the question is whether you could take the slot if it was offered to you.

David Warburton: Yes, absolutely. That would be perfect.

Chair: Are there any questions or comments from Committee members? No? Then thank you very much. Your ordeal is over.

Helen Goodman made representations.

Q4 Chair: I know that Sir Edward Leigh is chairing the Trade Union Bill Committee in Committee Room 12 at the moment, so is unable to be with us.

Helen Goodman: Yes. Everybody had prior engagements, as is the way, but I think we now have more people than when I wrote to you originally. We might be at 15. Do you want me to tell you my latest list?

Q5 Chair: You can add them afterwards, Helen—that will be fine.

Helen Goodman: I will say why I took this initiative and why we would like the debate. The negotiations in Paris at the end of November and the beginning of December are really important on the road to addressing climate change in an effective way. Obviously there are DECC questions and so on and so forth, but we have not had a proper debate to prepare for those negotiations. It is always the case that it is interesting to ask Ministers what they have done and why they did it when they come back from meetings, but it is more important to discuss beforehand what is going to happen.

On this internationally significant event, the Pope produced an encyclical that was absolutely groundbreaking. I do not know how many of you have seen it, but it is a 200-page letter looking at climate change in the context of social and economic factors around the world. Obviously, the Catholic Church informs its encyclicals with the work of the bishops across the globe. I will just say, in parentheses, that I am not a Roman Catholic, but I think the encyclical is a very good document and it is worth our while debating it.

The Pope describes the document as a call to all citizens. In particular, he makes requests of politicians. That is very significant. What he is saying in the document is that too often we politicians mask problems and spin issues, and do not address them sufficiently often in a long-term way. It would be really good for the reputation of this House if we responded positively to what the Pope has said here.

Obviously parts of the letter were read out in churches across the country, and there are nearly 6 million Catholics in the country. CAFOD has a petition about it, although it has not reached 100,000—it has reached 20,000. It is quite clear that there are two constituencies who will be extremely interested: members of the Church, and everyone who is interested in climate change, which we all know is a large group of people.

The subject is important, there is interest in it and a debate will be good for the reputation of the House.

Q6 Bob Blackman: In terms of timing, you quite rightly say that you would like to have the debate before the Paris talks commence. Our position is that we generally get allocated Thursdays for debates in the House and we have the November recess coming up. Is this something you would be pressing to have before the November recess—so, in the first week of November—or could it wait until the 19th? It would still be before the conference, but only just.

Helen Goodman: The 19th would be fine. I want to insert a small personal note. I have to have an eye operation, so it cannot be on 17 November or 26 November if I am to take part, although there are obviously other colleagues who want to take part. The 26th, which is my deadline, fits with being before the conference anyway.

Q7 Bob Blackman: It would be the 19th, I suspect, if we get allocated that day.

Helen Goodman: That would be just as good as the 5th. We are asking for three hours, not six.

Q8 Chair: Though the Pope's encyclical is important within this, the crucial thing is the Paris negotiations. Therefore, might a title change be helpful? It could make reference to the Pope's encyclical, but it is really about the Paris conference on climate change at the end of November and December.

Helen Goodman: You are obviously experienced in deciding on these debates, so I am happy to be advised by you.

Q9 Chair: It was just a thought. We will let you know ASAP. Mike Hennessy will be in touch about the extra names.

Helen Goodman: When will you make a decision?

Q10 Chair: This afternoon.

Helen Goodman: Right. I should also tell you that I did not come up in the ballot for Westminster Hall, so the Chamber is now beginning to be the only option for us.

Margaret Ritchie, Jim Shannon, Melanie Onn, Calum Kerr and Richard Arkless made representations.

Q11 Chair: I am just hanging out a rod here, but this could be about fisheries policy, is that right?

Ms Ritchie: Absolutely.

Jim Shannon: It's a net, not a rod, you would need.

Ms Ritchie: Thank you very much, Chair, and members of the Backbench Business Committee. We are making a request on a cross-party basis and I offer apologies from the chair of the all-party fisheries group, Sheryll Murray, who is also a signatory to this request and who has sent me a letter saying she supports the request for a debate.

You will recall, Mr Chair, in your previous membership of this Committee, as will other members, that we came every year of the previous Parliament seeking a general debate on fisheries in advance of the EU negotiations which take place every year in Brussels about the total allowable catch per fish species. Those negotiations determine EU fishing opportunities for the following year. Other issues we would like to discuss are the science upon which those quota allocations are based; the landing obligation and discards for demersal fishing; marine conservation zones; and the general impact of funding for infrastructure at fishing harbours. It is an all-encompassing debate and will include what happens onshore and offshore, and the impact on the catch sector and the processing sector.

Q12 Chair: Off the top of your head, do you know when in December those negotiations take place?

Ms Ritchie: I am not absolutely sure, but they are normally held around 16 or 17 December.

Q13 Chair: That is mid-December.

Ms Ritchie: We usually have this debate either in the first or second week in December in the Chamber.

Q14 Chair: Does anyone want to add anything? Jim?

Jim Shannon: To back up Margaret's request, this is something that brings us all together—Scots, Welsh, Northern Irish and English. Fishing unites us, and the bureaucracy of Europe unites us.

Q15 Chair: That is a wonderful concept. We are united by the bureaucracy of Europe.

Jim Shannon: Many of us have constituents who have felt the knives of Europe with all that bureaucracy. I am very keen to have this debate; we do have it every year. It is one that fills the Chamber and brings all the parties together. We are always united in support of the Minister who always goes to fly the flag for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is very important to do that and to have the debate.

Melanie Onn: I echo Margaret's sentiments on the importance of this to many coastal communities across the four nations. It is an integral part of many areas around the country. Rarely do we get the opportunity to talk about it, although we may well talk about it within our own parties occasionally. It is important to have the debate on a national stage and let our constituents know that we understand the difficulties that the industry in the catching and processing sectors face currently and in the past. It shows we are listening to their concerns.

Calum Kerr: I agree. I would like to say that we pro-Europeans also welcome the debate. The fact that you have support from Cornwall all the way up to the Highlands shows that the debate is needed. I have met quite a lot of the large Scottish fishing groups recently. It is important that their voices are heard before such an important negotiation.

Richard Arkless: As a member of the SNP, I would reiterate what Calum said, being another pro-European supporter. My constituency has 200 miles of coastline, and fishing is extremely important, as it is to all coastal communities across the four nations. I certainly corroborate the application for the debate.

Q16 Mr Hollobone: I recognise this is a really important issue for you and your constituents, but I am always suspicious about applications for a debate that are supported by the argument that it happens every year. When this Committee was first established we soon discovered that a lot of these annual debates did not really attract that much interest at all. I know it is important for your constituents and that there are lots of constituency issues to raise. I understand that but you could make

it a lot more exciting. For example, you could have a motion, “This House calls for the repatriation of fishing to this country from the European Union.”

Jim Shannon: Hear, hear!

Q17 Mr Hollobone: Some of you would agree and some would disagree, but the Chamber would be packed, because there would be a lot of interest in that. The Chamber will not be packed with your fisheries debate. You will have all the fishing MPs there but you will not have many non-fishing MPs. If you were not prepared to go for that really exciting option, why not put down a motion saying, “This House calls for Her Majesty’s Government to draw up an action plan to improve the infrastructure in fishing ports.”? Something like that is calling on the Government to do something. Just having an annual general debate about fisheries ticks a certain number of boxes, but to make this really interesting, why not use the opportunity of three hours in the Chamber of the House of Commons to ask the Government to do something different?

Ms Ritchie: We appreciate what you are saying on these matters. We are not seeking to be controversial but, on previous occasions when this debate has taken place, a number of MPs participated, outwith the group here and from across the Chamber. Sometimes it was difficult for Members to get a contribution in because of the time limit imposed.

I know you are seeking to get as full a participation as possible but I can tell you that past experience tells us that there will be great participation. The reason for that is to ensure and underscore the value of fishing, both onshore and offshore, to our communities, and particularly those annual negotiations that take place in Brussels every December. We want to ensure that the Minister who is going to be sitting at the negotiating table obtains the best possible deal for fishermen right throughout the UK, whether in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. We want to give him that message and inform him of our experiences of the particular issues that impact on our fishing communities. That can only be done on the Floor of the House.

Jim Shannon: The Minister needs to be assured of the support from those on the Floor. He needs the encouragement and knowledge that he gets from those who participate in the debate. Irrespective of Europe—I might be in a minority on that at the minute, but that is by the bye; I do not mind being in a minority—I am very happy to put forward a viewpoint that unites us all. The Minister has to speak with a voice for us all.

Q18 Bob Blackman: May I confirm that ideally, the debate would take place in either the first or second week of December, so that it informs the Minister beforehand?

Ms Ritchie: Yes, exactly.

Q19 Bob Blackman: I confess that I am merely a consumer of fish, not anything else. Are you aware of any key strategic issues that are going to be debated and discussed as part of the programme at the moment?

Ms Ritchie: May I suggest to you the whole issue of discards and the landing obligation for the demersal fleet, alongside the quota issue? The major issue is that, for European fishing opportunities for the North sea, the Irish sea and wherever else in terms of 2016, the landing obligation for the demersal fleet and the science dictates everything for the European Union.

Q20 Bob Blackman: So would there be disagreement among colleagues over what that should be? I am looking at what Mr Hollobone is looking at: are we going to get a debate or, with due respect, a whole series of MPs standing up for their constituencies and their people, all saying more or less the same sort of thing?

Ms Ritchie: I would imagine that there would be a bit of both.

Jim Shannon: I would give you the other side.

Bob Blackman: Okay.

Ms Ritchie: In that respect, we are also looking for regionalisation, and that means a certain level of subsidy in terms of the European Union—that little level of control in terms of decision making about the best use of the quotas that have been allocated to us in our fishing communities.

Chair: May I thank you all and the assembled fisher folk? We will make a decision and let you know ASAP.

Philip Davies made representations.

Q21 Chair: Right, Philip. You are making an application about International Men's Day.

Philip Davies: Indeed. My pitch is fairly straightforward, in the sense that every year since I can remember, and certainly since I have been a Member of this House, which is for 10 years now, we have had an annual debate—in the last few years, this Committee has granted one; in fact, I think I was on the Committee when it did so—for International Women's Day. The debate has been held every single year, so I thought that in the spirit of gender equality, it would only be right to have a debate to commemorate International Men's Day, which conveniently falls on Thursday 19 November, which is a date for which you may or may not have some time to allocate. It would be very fitting, because, of course, not only do we have International Women's Day, but we have women and equality questions every month in the Chamber, which we do not have for men, so the opportunity for men to raise issues that are important to them is very limited. To give you a flavour of the type of things that may come up and which will be part of International Men's Day—*[Interruption.]* I am not entirely sure why it is so humorous, but we could discuss issues such as men's shorter life expectancy, wider male health issues, many of which are unreported due to men's embarrassment to talk about such things, the high suicide rate among men, the propensity for violence against men—there are many male victims of domestic violence, which again may not be reported because of embarrassment—the underachievement by boys in education compared with girls, issues around father-child relationships and the way that fathers sometimes feel they do not get a fair crack of the whip in terms of custody of their children and so on. All those issues affect an awful lot of people around the country. Whether people agree with other people's views, it is important that the House debates such issues. People recognise that they are real issues for many people in the country.

In the spirit of gender equality, given that we have a debate every year on International Women's Day—I suspect it will continue under this Committee—it is only fair to have an opportunity to debate these issues under the flag of International Men's Day, which, this year, is on Thursday 19 November.

Q22 Jess Phillips: You must excuse me for laughing, but the idea that men do not have the opportunity to ask questions in this place is frankly laughable, and I say that as the only woman on this Committee. It seems to me that every day is men's day.

Philip Davies: With respect, I was making the point not that men do not have the opportunity to ask, but about men's issues. There is a big difference between men raising issues and the raising of men's issues.

Q23 Jess Phillips: But one could raise men's issues in any single one of the question sessions. Men's health, such as prostate cancer, could be raised in men's questions, could it not?

Philip Davies: I very much look forward to these arguments being deployed when we come to consider a debate on International Women's Day because exactly the same arguments could be raised. Women's health issues and equality issues could be raised in women and equality questions in other forms. All I am asking for is an equal crack of the whip. If those issues can be raised without having a debate on International Men's Day, obviously the same applies to International Women's Day, but those arguments have never won the day before this Committee.

Jess Phillips: I just think it is worth pointing out the idea that both these Houses in any way reflect gender equality is to me frankly laughable. In the fight for equality, I am not sure that the men on this list have much to fight for.

Bob Blackman: I can empathise with many of the issues you are concerned about. Many people would say that people do not talk about testicular cancer or prostate cancer because of fear of embarrassment. That is clearly an issue that needs a lot more public debate.

My concern is the balance of debate. On the list of potential speakers—

Jess Phillips: All men.

Q24 Bob Blackman: Well, the fact that they are all men does not matter so much. What does matter is that there does not seem to be a preponderance of people from across the House. They seem to be concentrated from the Conservative party. That either means that the Conservative party treats such issues seriously and the other parties do not or, more likely, that you have not been able to gain people from the other parties to sign up.

Philip Davies: It is a fair point. I was made aware of this issue relatively recently and I raised it in Business questions. It reflects the fact that that is the number of people I managed to see between business questions and having to get the form in by 5 o'clock on the same day. I would like to think that getting that many names in such a short period shows that there is quite an appetite for a debate. I would be astonished if there were not Members from across the House who have constituents who are concerned about the issues that I have just raised.

Q25 Mr Hollobone: The points that Miss Phillips has raised would no doubt contribute to the debate. Those who do not feel that men's issues should be given an airing can put that point of view. Part of the point of this Committee is to generate lively debates in which people disagree with one another, not just a parade of people coming out with the same views all in agreement. From that point of view, the controversial element of Mr Davies's application would be quite attractive. I want to ask

Mr Davies whether he has asked the Leader of the House for time to debate this issue in Government time, and what the Government's response was.

Philip Davies: Yes. And we have had a lively debate here in the Committee, which I contend bodes well for a debate in the Chamber. I did ask for a debate, and it is perfectly clear that the Government aren't going to give any time for such a debate. They feel that the appropriate vehicle for such a debate is the Backbench Business Committee. Again, it seems that the Government's view is that, given that this Committee allocates time for International Women's Day debates, this is the appropriate body for considering a debate on International Men's Day.

Q26 Mr Nuttall: I was just going to make that very point. You mentioned in passing, in answer to the previous question from Jess, that you asked the Leader of the House for a debate in Government time and were directed to this Committee. Moving on to the venue for the debate, as far as you are aware, where have the previous debates on International Women's Day been held?

Philip Davies: Look, it is not for me to tell this Committee where it should and shouldn't hold debates in the time it gets allocated. That is a decision for you, and I will respect whatever decision you make. My pitch is that I am just asking for parity with what the Committee does for International Women's Day. I see that the two go side by side and hand in hand. All I ask is for an even crack of the whip for both of us. That's my pitch. I have not come here to make demands. All of that is up to you.

Q27 Chair: I think the point that Bob made is very relevant. You have an application with supporters numbered 1 to 13, three of whom are from the DUP and the rest are from the Conservative party. When we are granting time for a debate, the normal criteria we use is that there is cross-party support for the debate. What we would ask, in pursuance of your application, is that you try to get some Members from other parties to sign up to the debate.

Philip Davies: I don't know whether this is seemly at the Committee—I am sure you will rule me out of order if it is not, Mr Chairman—but I am prepared to cut you a deal: if you reserve 19 November, I will go away and get some names from other political parties to satisfy your requirement.

Chair: That is a very interesting proposition, but it is not one we have taken up with anyone else so far.

Q28 Jess Phillips: It is not that I don't care about men's issues; it is that I am hoping for parity.

Philip Davies: Hear, hear.

Q29 Jess Phillips: I absolutely care about men's issues. When I have got parity, and when women in these buildings have parity, you can have your debate—and that will take an awfully long time.

Philip Davies: I am not requesting a debate on representation in the House of Commons. I am asking for a debate on men's issues. I would like to think that people can recognise that the list of issues I gave earlier are genuine issues, which are very rarely debated in the House of Commons.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Philip. We will obviously have a discussion, as you know—you are a former member of the Committee—about taking that forward. I will honestly say that for us to properly consider your application, it really does need to be backed up with people who support the debate from other parties.

Dr Tania Mathias, Zac Goldsmith and Ruth Cadbury made representations.

Q30 Chair: Over to you.

Dr Mathias: The reason for this request for a debate on the final report of the Airports Commission into airport expansion is that, as everybody knows, in the summer the Airports Commission had their report. Many colleagues and MPs felt at that point that they wanted a debate. Many short points were made at the statement stage. Many MPs have had submissions, and there have been public meetings and public rallies about this issue. It is a cross-party wish to have a full debate. It is not just about the areas mentioned by the Airports Commission—Heathrow and Gatwick. We believe it affects all regions, which is the reason for the debate.

3.5 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.30 pm

On resuming—

Q31 Chair: We will go back to where we left off before we were so rudely interrupted by the Division bell.

Dr Mathias: Thank you, Mr Mearns. As I was saying, the wish for the debate on the final report of the Airports Commission, is because we have had a lot of time since the summer but not a chance for a serious, long debate. There was an opportunity after the statement but many colleagues felt that not all the issues had been aired. Apart from affecting, obviously, the south-east, there are repercussions for airports generally in the UK. That is why we believe other MPs would wish to be involved. It is also not just about the infrastructure; it is about the investment, the environment and implications for UK flights, including from Scotland and Ireland. That is why we are asking for a full debate.

Ruth Cadbury: As I am sure the Committee realises, there is national and international interest in where the additional runway in the south-east goes. Dr Mathias and I are from opposing parties. In and around Gatwick and Heathrow most of the MPs are either Labour or Conservative, but we know from meetings, debates and contributions on the day the Secretary of State made the statement on the Davies Commission, that there is interest from all parties represented in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the south-west as well.

As Dr Mathias said, it is a very major national infrastructure project with international implications. There are issues around trade, tourism, public expenditure and EU laws, particularly on air quality. People will want to speak on issues such as climate change as well as the obvious ones such as noise and air quality.

We think there should be an all-day debate because of the wide range of interests from all around the country and all political parties that have concerns and will want to speak. The extensiveness and high quality of the work in the Davies Commission report deserves serious scrutiny before the Prime Minister makes a decision.

Of course, there is the issue about the Prime Minister's original statement appearing to come to a conclusion on where the additional runway should be. Now he is being asked to make another decision. We feel it is important to have a non-votable debate in Parliament before that time. Of course, there has also been an election since the issue of airport capacity was last fully debated by the House.

Zac Goldsmith: I am very sorry to be late; my sincere apologies. I do not know what has already been said and do not want to risk repeating it. I have one point. This report merits real scrutiny. There is the quality of the report and the data in it, plus the mismatch between the data and the final conclusion of the report. It looks as though the conclusion was written before the data were gathered.

I think Parliament is the best possible vehicle for applying that scrutiny before a very significant decision is made by the Government—a decision which, at the moment at least, looks as if it is heading in the wrong direction. I strongly support this pitch by my colleagues for a proper, lengthy, real debate.

Q32 Bob Blackman: Thanks for the presentation. Just a couple of detailed points, really. One is that at the moment you are asking for a full day's debate, which would be six hours. Is that what you are asking for?

Dr Mathias: That is correct, yes.

Q33 Bob Blackman: So at the moment you basically have a group of MPs, generally speaking, who are locally based around Heathrow airport—I think, on this list. For a full six-hour debate we would be looking at probably around 25 to 30 speakers, which clearly you do not have. I hear what you say about the interest, but for this Committee in considering applications, because there are competing requests, we have to look at those that have complete applications rather than those that do not.

I do not think you will have a problem securing the additional speakers, but we would want to know, because there is competition for debates, that you will definitely fill the full debate with all those speakers. So I think one of the things that is almost certainly going to get fed back to you is we need to see a full list of speakers, to make sure that the full time is taken up and other people who have applied for debates are not disappointed.

Dr Mathias: That is fine.

Q34 Bob Blackman: That is the first comment. The second issue is one of timing for such a debate. Clearly, the Government have indicated that they are going to come to a conclusion by the end of the year. What sort of ideal timing would you like for holding the debate?

Dr Mathias: November.

Q35 Bob Blackman: November is a long month.

Dr Mathias: I was hoping that today you might say not next week but the week after next—

Q36 Bob Blackman: That is recess.

Dr Mathias: The week after recess. Indeed, it is chasing up people; there are some people I have seen who verbally are supportive, but I need to get those names down.

Q37 Mr Hollobone: Is the main thrust of your argument that this report is flawed?

Dr Mathias: Not from my point of view; it is more to have that debate and have all arguments, exactly as colleagues are saying. Some colleagues will want to be talking about climate change, some about infrastructure, some will be on the data—but there are so many issues to be debated. It is not just that.

Zac Goldsmith: I do not want to be misinterpreted. I gave you a very clumsy initial opening remark. It is not the data; the data are actually very interesting, but I think the data in the report support a conclusion of no to Heathrow expansion, which is why we were surprised that the commission ended up with the recommendation it did. What I would like to do, knowing that MPs are very busy and knowing also that Government Ministers are very busy, is to ensure that the data are properly seen and scrutinised before people attach too much importance to the final conclusion; because I think if people do read the report and do pay attention to the details they will be much more sceptical about Heathrow expansion than they may be at the moment.

Ruth Cadbury: The report is significantly more detailed than has ever been done before in considering airport expansion. In that way, my original statement saying that it is a quality piece of work—it is way better than it has been before. But I would agree with Zac Goldsmith, because it does warrant scrutiny—the mismatch between the conclusion and the facts. Also, additional information has come out since, in terms of issues such as air quality and also the way the economic case came about.

I think in terms of Mr Blackman's question about the number of speakers, we just need to look at the day when the Secretary of State made the statement on the day that the Davies report was released. I think I was the last speaker that day because I had been a bit naughty and not asked permission to leave the Chamber, so I was punished by being put on last, and I think we were there for at least an hour and a half, if not two hours. I think there were roughly 30 Members wanting to contribute, and they were from all the countries and all the parties. We have no doubt that there will be full interest in a full day's debate.

Q38 Gavin Newlands: Following on from Mr Blackman's point, which has just been mentioned again, I feel the application would be far stronger if it had Scottish and Irish MPs, because of the massive impact on so-called regional airports, and on jobs etc. There is also an additional complication in that there are the EVEL consequences of this possible decision, which might be touched upon by Scottish Members. The application would be far stronger if Scottish MPs were listed.

Dr Mathias: Absolutely. By all means tell your colleagues to get back to me, and I will chivvy them up. That is the debate that we need to have.

Chair: I must admit that I have a very open mind about the role that Heathrow plays, but I have to tell you that Heathrow has been working in collusion with regional airports such as Newcastle to try to get MPs in regions such as the north-east on board. They are dangling a carrot. They say that, currently, the situation at Heathrow if there is any congestion is that provincial flights are bumped first in favour of international flights in terms of slots and that runway expansion at Heathrow would mean that provincial aircraft will be much better catered for. That is the sort of carrot that they are dangling to try to get MPs from the regions on board.

Q39 Mr Nuttall: Thank you very much for that presentation. You have asked for a whole day's debate in the Chamber. The matter is clearly one of national interest. Of that there is no doubt in my mind. Although they are not before us today, I hope that given further time and consultation you will be able to secure names on the list of speakers. Have you considered actually putting down a motion that the House could vote on to give some guidance to the Government on the issue? It could state: "That this House supports the building of a third runway at Heathrow." That would then give the House something to vote on, would give some focus to the debate and would attract national media attention. Incidentally, I am not saying that. You could easily say: "That this House opposes the building..." Whichever you would prefer.

Dr Mathias: Absolutely. There is maybe a good case for that, but I still think that the advantage of a debate in the Chamber is that it can cover so many more issues than just that conclusion. My fear is that it that it would funnel down into one topic when the decision would affect so much more than that.

Ruth Cadbury: Dr Mathias and I are new to this. There is the phrase "the right ordering of things" and my understanding is that it is appropriate that the Prime Minister makes a decision and then there is the voting debate. I think our key case for why there shouldn't be a vote is that it is about scrutiny and unpicking all the different elements of the Davies report. This isn't just about being pro or anti-Heathrow. The Davies report said that three options were deliverable. It is about looking at those three options and the logic by which the commission came to those conclusions. We think that the most appropriate forum is a non-voting, scrutiny-type forum, but because of the importance and the public interest, nationally and internationally, in the issue we believe that the debate should have as much time as possible and be in the highest-level place. We would settle for less, but we would rather go for the whole day because we believe that there is sufficient interest both within Parliament and outside.

Chair: Thank you. We have had a busy day and will be making our considerations as soon as we possibly can.

Jim Shannon made representations.

Q40 Chair: We now have an additional request from Jim Shannon, who was in the throes of putting an application together and just wants a quick word with us in anticipation of an application coming in.

Jim Shannon: It's actually here. I apologise for that. I thank the Committee for giving me the opportunity to request this. The topic will be, "That this House has considered the protection and promotion of human rights across the world in the light of international Human Rights Day." The request is for 10 December, which is a Thursday. We will be happier if it is in the Chamber but, if it is

not, we will be happy to have it in Westminster Hall. It has cross-party support from Conservatives, Labour, Scots Nationalists, the SDLP and my party. We could have quickly added to the 15 names here but did not get round to that due to the shortness of time.

To explain simply and quickly why we have requested this, significant human rights violations occurring across the world are linked to UK foreign policy concerns. Discussing human rights is relevant to all parties. Magna Carta, which celebrated its 800th anniversary this year, is often referred to as one of the foundations of human rights and the rule of law.

There has never been a debate on international human rights in the House of Commons during my time here—this is my sixth year. There have been many thematic debates on human rights and specific areas across the world such as religion and police, but there has never in my time been a debate on international human rights. I am asking the Committee if we could have that debate on 10 December, which is human rights day, a good time for this House to express itself on the issue.

Q41 Chair: So we will expect the paperwork to follow.

Jim Shannon: It is here.

Q42 Chair: I thought you said you wanted to get some more names on first.

Jim Shannon: Is 15 enough? I could get other names but I wanted to give you the papers today if that is possible.

Q43 Bob Blackman: We are not in a rush, are we, for 10 December?

Jim Shannon: I spoke to the Clerk of the Committee and he suggested it was important to get this request in early for 10 December, and that is why I am doing this.

Q44 Chair: Okay. If you submit your application with the additional names by Thursday that will be fine.

Jim Shannon: Perfect. I will do that. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.