

Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster

Oral evidence: [Consultation on the Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster](#),

HC 870

29 February 2016

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Members present: Chris Grayling (Chair), Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Chairman), Chris Bryant, Lord Carter of Coles, Lord Deighton, Neil Gray, Lord Laming, Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg, Baroness Smith of Basildon, Lord Wallace of Tankerness.

Questions 1-54

Witnesses: **Craig Woodhouse**, Chairman, and **Tony Grew**, Honorary Secretary, Parliamentary Press Gallery, gave evidence.

Q1 Chris Grayling (Chair): Welcome. Shall we start by getting you to introduce yourselves to the Committee? I don't think you know everybody here.

Mr Woodhouse: I am Craig Woodhouse, Chairman of the Parliamentary Press Gallery.

Mr Grew: I am Tony Grew, Secretary of the Parliamentary Press Gallery.

Q2 Chris Grayling (Chair): You guys are in the long-established Press Gallery. To start off, what is your assessment of the set-up as it is now—the facilities available to you and their condition?

Mr Woodhouse: Our view, I think, is that the facilities are broadly good, the main reason being where they are located: they are right at the heart of Parliament. They allow us easy access to the Chamber, to Members and to other parts of the Parliamentary Estate. There are some issues with them, similar to those that parliamentarians have—the building is outdated, the mobile phone signal is not brilliant and we could do with some wi-fi throughout. But broadly speaking, they serve the purpose for which they were designed and installed at the end of the second world war.

Mr Grew: I broadly agree. They are the perfect facilities for a journalist working in the 1950s, in some ways. When you walk out of the Press Gallery, there is a row of 16 phone

booths with fold-in doors, a little table and a built-in ashtray, which tells us a bit about what life was like for the lobby then.

We have a lot of facilities there that would need updating. For example, in the physical Press Gallery itself, we have speakers, as you do down in the Chamber, but what we really need are plug sockets to charge our devices. One other thing I would point out is that no part of the Press Gallery is accessible to someone in a wheelchair. That is another major issue. Journalists with disabilities are effectively shut out of the building just because of the design that comes with being a post-war design.

Mr Woodhouse: There are some issues with broadcast as well that we might get on to, according to your other questions. I am happy to take those as and when you see fit.

Chris Grayling (Chair): Okay. Who would like to go next?

Q3 Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Chairman): Thank you very much for giving up some of your time to come and see us this afternoon. As co-Chairman with Chris, it might help if I say, by way of introduction, that at this stage of the whole restoration and renewal project, although we are looking in great detail at the preliminary work that has been done to date, what we will not be getting into by the time we come forward with our report later on this year is detailed design specifics. Reading your written evidence again, I think a lot of the comments you covered were very much about what you might want to see in the future. Some of those details will be ones that we or whoever is doing this in the future might want to return to down the line.

My area of interest is this: if we are to decide to move out of Parliament for a temporary period while works take place, what would you consider to be the most important things for you, as the Press Gallery, when we are not here in the Palace of Westminster? What are your top needs?

Mr Woodhouse: There are several. One would be location. We would not want to be farmed out somewhere else and stuck somewhere where we could not retain access to the Chamber and to yourselves. Although we appreciate there will be a certain amount of “make do and mend”, there will be some specifics that might not have been taken into consideration. For example, the Press Association maintain a constant presence in both the House of Commons Chamber and the House of Lords Chamber. They have journalists on rotation, so they need to be as close as possible to the Chambers themselves.

Other than that, part of what we have been thinking about in drawing up our evidence is that covering Parliament requires certain things. It requires some desk space, an ability to use a computer and an ability to be near your colleagues. Those things will remain, whether that is during the decant or when we come back, no matter how media changes over the future. It is those kinds of thing—the space for us all to be there, as close as possible to the action.

Mr Grew: To address your comments, Baroness Stowell, the reason why the submission that we put forward concentrated on what the newly refurbished building might look like was that when we read through the report, we saw that the recommendation for the

Press Gallery was to remove all Press Gallery offices and facilities and replace them with a media centre that seemed to us a concerningly nebulous concept. That is one of the reasons why we put forward that submission.

In terms of the decant and the possibility of having two temporary Chambers for the House of Commons and the House of Lords, I agree—the phrase I would use is “no detriment”. That is a phrase we have heard a lot from the Scottish nationalists. I guess it is something similar for us. We would like to retain a sizeable Press Gallery in any temporary Chamber, so that the press are able to be in Parliament and physically see the Chamber at work. That is really important.

As you know as parliamentarians, a lot of our colleagues, just like a lot of MPs, will be watching what is going on in the Chamber while in their offices and taking phone calls. We really need to retain both an adequate sized Press Gallery and the ability to have close contact with MPs and peers. People outside the building may not have a good understanding of the way in which news is gathered and exchanged between journalists and Members, but those close quarters are a really important part of that.

Q4 Lord Wallace of Tankerness: You have talked about the importance of immediacy. I stress that this Committee has not come to any decision, but let’s say it was decided that both Houses should decant at once and it was not possible to co-locate. Are there any particular considerations about access and immediacy in respect of the House of Lords that you want to raise with us? Also, you mentioned broadcasting. Just so we don’t lose sight of it, do you want to elaborate on what facilities for broadcasting you would want?

Mr Grew: Craig, you have some detailed notes from the broadcasters. In terms of the House of Lords, it is important to stress again that the Press Association have permanent reporters based in the Lords—there is a PA reporter there at all times—so we would, again, want a facility for the press within the House of Lords that was a similar size to the one that we have now. Journalists, frankly, do spend less time in the Lords Gallery, although I am very keen to spend time in the Lords. I have found a lot of sense is spoken there—as I always say, it’s where the grown-ups live. But in terms of just the physical space, it would be the same sort of thing.

Mr Woodhouse: I stress—I used to be a PA Gallery reporter—in relation to the facilities in the Lords that, as you know, the attendance is not as high as it is in the Commons and they are not the same, but I think there could be a temptation, if that facility was not provided, to think that maybe that reporter wasn’t needed there anymore, and that would be detrimental to covering Parliament.

In terms of the broadcasters, they have some different considerations, different issues. To run through them, there are Sky, ITN and the BBC. Sky work out of Millbank entirely; they don’t have desks in the Press Gallery, but they cherish their access, obviously, and they come and use the live points, which I will come on to in a minute. The BBC have an office and a studio here, but do all their technical work through Millbank, with the exception of some radio, which they do in the studio, which is very close to the Chamber. ITN have their newsgathering team for Parliament in the building and they are very keen to retain that.

In terms of their actual facilities, the thing that came through quite strongly is that there are several live broadcast points: one in Central Lobby, one in the Committee corridor and one in Portcullis House. They are incredibly keen to retain live broadcast points as close to the Chamber as possible during a decant, because that enables them to cover big events in Parliament. For grabbing MPs and getting people to speak on TV, it's really important to them to be there. One gripe they have is that at the moment in Central Lobby there are only two broadcast points and there are three broadcasters.

The example given to me was that you can have all three national broadcasters broadcasting side by side in Downing Street, but you can't do that inside Parliament, which is a huge frustration, and they often have to squabble over it. So when we come back to whatever facilities we come back to, having three broadcast points, three live points, in several different locations would be incredibly useful to the broadcasters.

That's TV. When it comes to radio, the BBC's studio, which is quite close to the Chamber, is used to do an awful lot of radio. The BBC were keen to stress that proximity to the Chamber is absolutely vital, because it allows their journalists to be, for example, in Prime Minister's questions from 12 to 12.30 and go and cut a quick package or do a live for the radio from their location—for the "World at One", for example—and the same thing during statements. The studio is also heavily used by their regional correspondents when they come up, spend a day, speak to their regional MPs and then go and use it.

In terms of broadcast considerations, those were what came through quite strongly.

Q5 Baroness Smith of Basildon: First, I am sorry that there wasn't the opportunity, for some reason or other, to speak to Deloitte before they did the report. That, I think, would have been helpful; I am sorry that did not happen.

There seem to be two issues. One is what happens if there is a decant and how you operate then. The other is what happens post decant and the opportunity to modernise and improve. Obviously, there will be further discussions on both of those in order to work with you. But I notice in your report—you mentioned as well, Tony, the media centre not being asked for and not being required. Is that because you are against the concept, or is it just unclear what the concept is? Is it the case that if it was clarified in detail and you had an input, that might be a way forward, but there is just a lack of clarity at the moment?

Mr Grew: I have a couple of points about that. The first is that anyone who is an historian of Parliament, like Mr Bryant, will know that the press has fought a constant battle historically to try to retain its facilities within the building, so we were concerned, obviously, that Moncrieff's, which is a popular dining area, and the café bar—

Baroness Smith of Basildon: Best fish and chips in Westminster.

Mr Grew: Best fish and chips in Westminster—and also open to all passholders, not just to the press. There is a delicate ecosystem in how the Press Gallery and the lobby work. It is unusual for journalists from all of the broadcasters and publications to work physically in the same building. Sports reporters do not all work in the same building all the time; they may go to press conferences together, but they do not work alongside each other.

There is a collegiate atmosphere, but it requires walls between newspapers and it requires newspapers to have separate offices, albeit on the same corridor and within proximity of the Chamber, for it to operate. So we were concerned that a media centre would be, first, an attempt to remove the Press Gallery's historic facilities; secondly, an attempt to put the media into one large room, which would be detrimental to the way in which the Gallery operates; and thirdly, we were concerned because in only one of the options presented by Deloitte was it mentioned that the media centre would be in the Palace, and obviously that is a major concern for us.

The second issue about a media centre is that the broadcasters have already invested significant facilities at 4 Millbank. What they require is not a new media centre in this building, but more access points that they can broadcast from. In terms of non-broadcast journalists, we tend to speak to MPs in public places or in their offices. We don't need a centre for MPs to go to for us to access them. That is not really how journalism works in that building. So those were the three main concerns that we had.

However, I agree that this is an amazing opportunity for us to remodel this building to make it into something that is fit for the 21st century. Somewhere where mobile phone signals and wi-fi work would be a huge improvement for us.

Mr Woodhouse: On that point, for example, we don't have access to the Parliament wi-fi officially, so, whether public wi-fi throughout the building is something that you were thinking of, anyway, it would help us do our job and would be incredibly useful.

We have got our own wi-fi in the Press Gallery. The way in which the IT infrastructure works up there is slightly odd: each newspaper controls its own IT infrastructure up in the Press Gallery through a central point to which someone holds the key that plugs into the wider outside. It is a very cumbersome process for rigging up new computers and so on and so forth. I understand why our infrastructures are kept separate, because we all have different systems and do not necessarily need to be plugged into the parliamentary intranet IT system, but as it works at the moment it is very complicated.

Q6 Chris Grayling (Chair): I can take it, then, that we will get an enthusiastic voice of support for an upgrade project from the journalists writing in the Gallery.

Mr Woodhouse: Sorry?

Q7 Chris Grayling (Chair): I assume that when we bring forward our proposals, they will be greeted with enthusiasm by the team in the Press Gallery.

Mr Woodhouse: I hope so. There are obvious concerns. There will be pitfalls. We were discussing this the other day. There is certainly a way to sell this by making sure we protect an incredibly historic building and making sure it is fit for purpose for the 21st century, the 22nd century and beyond.

Mr Grew: Can I add to that? You're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't. You will face criticism from the press if you decide to spend money to refurbish the

building for the 21st century. Similarly, if it falls down, you will probably face even greater criticism. It is a political decision that will take with it the consequences that come with political decisions.

Q8 Chris Grayling (Chair): So you'll give us a hard time, come what may.

Mr Grew: I am personally very enthusiastic, but I am very enthusiastic about everything.

Chris Grayling (Chair): The truth is that we have to do something about the building, anyway. Even if we move out into a purpose-built Parliament, it is still a grade I listed building that we have to maintain.

Q9 Mr Rees-Mogg: I want to ask about how essential it is to be near the Chamber. I know a lot of the work now goes on in Portcullis House, such as meeting Members of Parliament. The Members' Lobby historically was full of journalists, but now one or two appear after Prime Minister's questions. It is not as it was. So is the immediate physical location essential, or would you be happy if the Press Gallery moved to Portcullis House?

Mr Woodhouse: We are very much of the view that we want to retain direct access to the Chamber. I know the criticism is often, "There are only a couple of you up there at any one time", but you will probably notice that when the Chamber is packed, so is the Press Gallery, and no one is suggesting that MPs should build a smaller Chamber because MPs aren't in it very often. That immediacy is really important to us to be able to get in at important times and feel part of what is going on.

Also, given the way that the Chamber and our offices are located, it is not just immediacy to the Chamber, but proximity to the rest of Parliament. We can get to the Committee Corridor very easily and we can get to Portcullis House to discuss things with people there. We can get down to the Lords very easily. It really is an ideal place right at the centre of the estate, rather than just this building itself.

Mr Grew: In terms of the proximity of having offices there, that centrality is also really important. As I am sure you are all aware as parliamentarians, a large amount of the meeting and talking to MPs and Peers happens because we are all walking along the same corridors; we are in the same areas and using the same cafés. That intercourse between MPs and the press helps the standard of reporting and our expertise in reporting.

Relocating the Press Gallery to PCH will remove journalists' ability to access the Chamber quickly. I understand that some MPs' offices are a seven-minute quick walk away from the Chamber, so they might not see the benefit of us being given closer access, but I often find that whenever something happens in the Chamber—for example, when an incident happens or when Mr Rees-Mogg gets up to speak—

Mr Rees-Mogg: Flattery will get you everywhere.

Mr Grew: —colleagues suddenly appear. That ability to access it quickly enhances our journalism.

Q10 Mr Rees-Mogg: Assuming we have a decant, how much less space can you get away with? It is possible that a temporary Chamber will be quite limited in space. As you say, the Gallery is full only during Prime Minister's questions and things such as that. Can some sharing of public space be done to keep the press happy—a sort of breathing in during the R&R period?

Mr Woodhouse: In terms of the physical Press Gallery, rather than our offices?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Yes.

Mr Woodhouse: We would have to consult on that and come back to you with the numbers if that is something you are looking at. There is very often more than one representative of each newspaper for something such as PMQs. We would be keen to retain that with no detriment, but equally we understand that there are other ways that we can follow the proceedings if we need to. We can come back to you with some numbers, if that would be helpful.

Mr Grew: I would like to come back to you on that. We understand that there may be constraints on space, so that is something we would have to consult with the Press Gallery on. As an example, probably the only time there is pressure for seats in the Lords Gallery is during the Queen's Speech. We manage to make accommodation for sketch writers, for example, and representatives from each newspaper. We are entirely open to being flexible about that, given the constraints that there may be on space.

Q11 Lord Laming: They always say very nice things about the Lords when they go there; we have noticed that. It warms our hearts to read their texts. You have illustrated very well the limitations that you have to cope with in this building. We are mindful of that for everybody. I was slightly surprised by what I read to be the hostility towards a media centre, because I have always been struck by the flexibility of the way that the media works in this day and age. I haven't noticed difficulty in getting Members of either House across the road to Millbank. Are you really as hostile to the concept of a media centre as your paper suggests?

Mr Woodhouse: One of the points that the broadcasters were making when I was discussing this with them is that they would disagree with you. They think it is actually quite difficult to get people over to Millbank. Particularly when there is a parliamentary event, they would much rather have somewhere that is as close as possible so they can report as soon as possible after an event has happened. That is particularly the case with live TV or live radio shows that go out as and when something is happening.

Another point that was made is that there are certain restrictions on who you can film from those live broadcast points. You can only film parliamentarians or do live pieces to camera, but, for example, if a particular event of interest takes place in a parliamentary Committee, you can't grab one of those guys.

Q12 Lord Laming: But in a media centre, you can film who you like.

Mr Grew: The difference is that we are talking about creating a space within one of the most historic buildings in the world—a bland background for broadcasters to broadcast from—whereas in fact the problem is the level of restriction. For example, you can photograph in Westminster Hall but not in St Stephen’s Chapel. That makes very little sense to me. I know that there are various constraints for members of the public, but actually I think the broadcasters would prefer a wider range of access points from which they can broadcast. Television is 70% to 80% about the picture, so if you are broadcasting from inside the Palace of Westminster, you want it to look like you are broadcasting from inside the Palace of Westminster and not from some faceless media centre.

Q13 Lord Laming: What percentage did you say is the background?

Mr Grew: It is somewhere between 70% and 80%—I can’t remember. If you are ever on TV, people aren’t listening to what you are saying; they are looking at the pictures. That is what makes radio such an amazing medium.

Q14 Chris Bryant: Sorry, what did you say?

Mr Woodhouse: The broadcasters were very keen to point out that they are not asking for “Borgen”-style free access and the ability to roam around and film with cameras. They are quite happy to have fixed points; they just need enough of them with interesting enough backgrounds to be able to tell the story of what is going on in here.

Q15 Baroness Smith of Basildon: Is your concern also about the privacy between papers? Is that the point you are making?

Mr Grew: Yes, that’s another point about the media centre. A media centre tends to imply a pen—an open room that anyone can wander into. One of the reasons why it works well collegiately is that *The Sun* is in a different room from the *Daily Mail*.

Mr Woodhouse: I should point out—I do not know how many of you have been up; we would be more than willing to show you around—that some papers and organisations do share offices. For example, *The Sun* is in with the *Evening Standard*, and we are also in with the *Daily Record*. We are also in with Paul Waugh and ITN, but all of those organisations have different deadlines. We have this agreement not to report on anything that we hear other people discussing, but if I need to take an important phone call, then I need to go into the stairwell to take it so that people are not listening.

That is not to say that in a future set of offices we want every individual organisation to have an individual office, because that is simply not flexible. In recent years we have seen the loss of some regional media but we have gained a lot of online media and our offices as they are currently set up allow us to move people in and out, juggle things around and

accommodate everybody. So we are not suggesting that everyone needs to be in their own box, but certainly having some boxes rather than one giant box would be very helpful.

Mr Grew: Just one other point: the make-up of the Press Gallery is constantly changing. I have got this booklet here, “Reports to the Press Gallery” from 1964, which is basically a very long complaint about how bad the facilities are, but one of the interesting things about that is that the BBC have got three pass holders at this point in 1964; obviously they have got considerably more now.

The growing part of the Gallery is from online media, and I think it is actually really heartening that organisations like *Huffington Post* and *BuzzFeed* and *politics.co.uk* are investing significant resource in having two or three members of staff based here. The media may change, but the requirement to have a desk, a space and a semi-private space, as it were, is not a requirement that we suspect will change in 2025 or beyond.

Q16 Neil Gray: Thank you very much indeed for coming in today. You have already mentioned that you see this as an opportunity to modernise the infrastructure and facilities that you require. Do you also see this as an opportunity to modernise some of the more archaic processes of the place, such as 15 minutes to vote when it could take 15 seconds, for instance?

Mr Woodhouse: I would certainly say absolutely yes with regards to broadcasters and some of the things we have discussed: who they can film, what they can do. But I appreciate that the shape of the building and how the rules are governed are done by two different sets of people. So I would encourage some amount of modernisation, and not just modernisation but future-proofing, because I think there is sometimes an element in this place to catch up to what is needed now rather than to leap forward into what might be needed in the future. The increase of digital media in the immediacy, there are some rules that I think could be altered slightly.

Mr Grew: As I said before, it is a huge opportunity. If you look at what the Speaker has done with the new Education Centre down at the Lords end of the building, that has been transformational in the way in which schoolchildren access and experience their visits to Parliament. Obviously it is not just about the press; it is about all sorts of aspects of that. But on that one point that you make about taking 15 minutes to vote, I know that is a particular bugbear with SNP Members, but I would point out that for some MPs that is a really good opportunity to see colleagues and speak to them and perhaps to consult with Ministers. Of course, the House of Commons is already experimenting with electronic voting—somewhat haphazardly, really—for some of the votes. It is a huge opportunity to put all of those things on the table, but as Baroness Stowell said at the beginning, that is a huge conversation for the future.

Mr Grayling, you asked us about how the press will receive your report, which we expect will come out later in the year. The one thing I would urge is when we are looking at a 2025 Parliament and everything that that can and should be, I would urge you to consult as widely and include the public as widely as possible in that. The wisdom of crowds is one that you can use here. As I said, it only occurred to us when we were putting together our evidence that there is no part of the Press Gallery facilities that are accessible in a

wheelchair—that is an outrage in 2016. So blue skies thinking and future-proofing are definitely the way to go.

Q17 Chris Bryant: We previously had evidence from people who made that point more broadly about the whole building. Something I should know the answer to but I do not, so I will ask you: who decides who gets a Lobby pass?

Mr Woodhouse: The Houses of Parliament authority—the Serjeant at Arms.

Q18 Chris Bryant: But is there a fixed list of how many people it should be? The question really is: who decides how many people get a desk?

Mr Grew: There are two different things. First of all, there is a historic allocation for publications. Some publications have come along—*The Huffington Post* started with one and now have, I think, two or three. *BuzzFeed* started with zero and now has two. Those are matters for the Serjeant at Arms. In terms of allocation of desks within the Press Gallery areas, that is the responsibility of our amazing administrator, Elizabeth Johnson, who is very much the headmistress figure of the Press Gallery, in consultation with me as secretary. It is slightly more complicated than the Whips allocating offices to MPs, but it is a similar sort of process.

Mr Woodhouse: To answer your question slightly, we do the best with the space according to the number of people we have. It is for the Serjeant at Arms to decide how many people have passes, how many per organisation and how many they think is an acceptable number. They tend to determine that based on use. They will monitor where the passes are being used. If your pass is being used regularly, they can see that you are regularly covering Parliament and they can see the value in having you here. They will then consider giving you a longer pass or an extra pass for your organisation, and so on and so forth. It is a constant negotiation.

Q19 Chris Bryant: Some of the things to which you have referred, such as the Central Lobby points and filming in Portcullis House, are relatively recent innovations. That never used to exist. I don't know how many years ago it was—seven, six or five? It was not very long ago. The other thing that happens on a regular basis for big events such as State Opening of Parliament, Budget day and the EU statement last week is that an encampment is built on Abingdon Green. Could you provide us with information on how often you do that? I wonder where you will do that if we decant.

Mr Grew: The broadcasters individually decide whether to build those temporary studios on Abingdon Green. Again, the reason that they build them there is because of the visuals. It has the beautiful Palace in the background.

Q20 Chris Bryant: Yes, but if we are decanted and the whole thing is covered in scaffold, you are not going to have that.

Mr Grew: I think the front of Richmond House has its charms, but I get your point. Again, that would be a matter for the broadcasters. We would be happy to consult with them and to provide you with evidence on that.

Q21 Chris Bryant: That would be useful. The other thing—I should know the answer to this—is that you do not pay for your offices, desks and phones in there, do you?

Mr Grew: That is correct.

Mr Woodhouse: Partly. We do not pay for the desks—the space—but, as I said before, we pay for the infrastructure. It is our computers, our phone lines, our IT, and so on and so forth.

Q22 Chris Bryant: And your cabling? I mean, how do we get cabling in for you?

Mr Grew: It is incredibly complicated. There is a room just off the Press Gallery that is full of a scary amount of different types of wiring and IT systems. That is one of the things that we would want to have streamlined. Also, if you are an editor of a newspaper or a news organisation, it is a significant investment to have two, three, four or five permanent members of staff based not in your head office, but here with their infrastructure attached to head office. That shows how seriously editors continue to take the physical presence of their journalists here. They understand its worth and value, otherwise they would not allow their staff to be here at a time of increasing budget cuts.

Q23 Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Chairman): I have one supplementary question. I want to go back to the decant period—and there are lots of ifs because we have not made any decisions. If we were to decant from the Palace of Westminster all in one go and if both Houses were to go to nearby but separate locations so there wasn't a single Palace of Westminster, how, if at all, would that affect your reporting of Parliament? If the Chamber of the House of Lords was in QEII and the House of Commons was in Richmond House, for instance, would that make a big difference to you?

Mr Grew: If we are being honest about it, the bulk of Press Gallery activity is Commons-focused. For many journalists, going to the Lords is going to a completely different part of the building so it would not make that much difference if they were located in different premises. I would urge that the bulk of the Press Gallery's physical facilities stay as close to the Commons as possible.

Mr Woodhouse: It will have certain effects on certain organisations, as we mentioned before, including for the Press Association. I believe that there is a live broadcast point in the House of Lords Lobby. If you were going to have two separate locations, I would encourage those facilities to be built in the Lords location as well as in the Commons location in case anything needs to be covered from there.

Q24 Lord Wallace of Tankerness: You talk about being damned if you do and damned if you don't. Sometimes we have thought in our deliberations that, possibly, after many years of work being done—after a careful approach to the budget but substantial amounts of money being spent—people might come back and find that ostensibly the building is not that much different from when we left it. A lot of work will have been done in sorting out the basement and the utility services, and stripping out and so on. In terms of a like-for-like refurbishment, should we take an opportunity to do other things with the building?

Mr Grew: I have been—I was going to say I have been lucky enough to have been—in the basement and up in the roof. I have had tours round the building and seen the decrepit state of some of the infrastructure. You would just be missing the biggest opportunity in a century to remake, reform and reshape the building to make it fit. As Craig said several times, future proofing is the way to go. I really don't see any point in spending £6 billion-worth of taxpayers' money just to reproduce exactly what we have now. Obviously there are many fine fittings and rooms that you would want to maintain, but I think that future parliamentarians will regret it if you do not take this opportunity to forget about like for like and go for the big picture.

Mr Woodhouse: I think it is a fantastic opportunity to retain a historic world palace while updating all the infrastructure behind it into something that will be fit in 100 years' time. That would be my recommendation.

Chris Grayling (Chair): Good. Thank you both very much indeed.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Rt Hon Lord Butler of Brockwell KG GCB CVO**, and **Rt Hon. Peter Riddell CBE**, Director, Institute for Government, gave evidence.

Q25 Chris Grayling (Chair): Welcome, gentlemen. Thank you very much for attending this Committee. I don't think either of you need any particular introduction, so we will go straight into things, if you are happy. I will start with you, Lord Butler, and then move on to Peter Riddell. Can I ask you about the importance of the co-location of Parliament and the main operations of Government?

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Yes. I have no doubt in saying that Parliament needs ready access to Ministers and *vice versa*. Departments also need ready access to Ministers and *vice versa*. It is an old-fashioned syllogism. The three need to be closely co-ordinated if Government is to work properly.

Peter Riddell: I absolutely endorse that. If I can reinforce that, it is a constitutional thing. We do not have a separation of powers; you are part of Parliament. If you look elsewhere—for example, in New Zealand and Australia—Ministers in New Zealand are all gathered together in one building, separate from their Departments. In Australia, which is perhaps a more pertinent example, the Ministers' offices in Canberra are all in the new Parliament building. Often, they do not go anywhere near their Departments. They are

surrounded by advisers in the Parliament building, and I have heard from the equivalent of permanent secretaries in Canberra that some Ministers literally never go into their Department, even though it is often quite near; it is not a big distance. I regard that as rather unhealthy.

We have done a certain amount of work on this at the Institute for Government through what we call “Ministers Reflect”, a series of exit interviews with people who were Ministers in the last Parliament. We have done over 40 so far, at all levels. A consistent point which has come out of these interviews, and out of other work that we have done, is that Ministers feel there is a gap between their Departments and Parliament. They do not spend as much time in Parliament as perhaps they should, although it depends on the type of job. Also, crucially, civil servants do not always understand sufficiently the importance of Parliament to Ministers, so if you separated them further, that problem could get much worse.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: If I may add to that from personal experience, I have visited Australia, New Zealand and Canada, which are all Parliaments and Governments on the Westminster model, so they are relevant to the issue you are discussing. I absolutely bear out the feeling that if the Minister and the Minister’s office are too separated from the Departments, things will not work well, but of course, the Minister has to have ready access to Parliament. I spent most of my life in the Treasury or the Cabinet Office, and we were very close, which was a great advantage. In considering the question, I think proximity is a very important factor.

Q26 Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Chairman): Thank you, Lord Butler and Mr Riddell, for coming and giving us some of your time. You have kind of covered what I wanted to establish, which is what your views are on proximity between Government Departments and Parliament. I suppose another way of putting the question to you is this. What is your response to people who argue in favour of Parliament being located somewhere other than Westminster? Some people speak in favour of that.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: I can see the argument. Some people would like the country not to be so London-centric and might therefore argue that it would be very healthy if Parliament were located somewhere else, but the dislocation that that would cause would be huge. Apart from moving Parliament itself, if Departments were left in London that would be disadvantageous. You see that, I think, with the European Parliament and countries where there is separation of capitals—South Africa, for example. Although I understand why people do not want Britain to be quite as London-centric as it is, perhaps they have not worked out the extent of the dislocation if Parliament were moved well away from London.

Peter Riddell: The alternative to decentralisation is, you could argue, devolution within the United Kingdom and decentralisation within England, not moving Parliament back to some medieval concept of sitting in Winchester or wherever. That would not be the answer.

For Parliament, Select Committees quite often go outside London for hearings, often on Mondays. There are perfect facilities with video conferencing to take evidence outside London and when MPs are in their constituencies. Moving Parliament would be incredibly expensive and rather gimmicky to my mind. I can just imagine the headlines—I am thinking

of my old life—about the cost of moving MPs, Peers and civil servants to Birmingham, Manchester or wherever.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Perhaps I can add another point. Even since my time, Government and politics have become very much quicker moving, and with 24/7 media and so on Ministers are constantly having to deal with matters quickly—I sometimes think too quickly. None the less, that is the way the world is and they need ready access to their advisers, both political and civil service. I believe in the old Haldane principle that there is a team in the interaction between politicians and civil servants. It works much the best if it is a team, but it needs to be a rapid-response team.

Q27 Chris Bryant: When this building was built, replacing the old buildings, Ministers had offices here for the first time, as well as wherever else they might have ministerial offices. They now have those offices in addition to their constituency offices. Is that really necessary in that quantity? Do we have to have an office for every Minister in the Palace?

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Yes, I think we do. My experience is that the Ministers I worked for spent much the greater part of their time in their Departments, but often they would be needed in the House, perhaps for a debate that lasted all day, because they had to vote or because something kept them in the House and they had to go on doing their work. I remember many occasions when that happened and coming over and getting crammed into rather small offices if there were many of us advising. That was certainly necessary, so I think Ministers do need a double base, but I would expect them, when they are not needed in Parliament, to spend most of their time in their Departments.

Peter Riddell: One other factor, of course, is that you, as a distinguished historian of Parliament, appreciate that there has been a sharp increase in the number of Ministers. In 1900, there were 35 Ministers with many more in the Lords than the Commons. With the size of the House of Commons having been reduced, there is an issue about the number of Ministers and so on. Oddly enough, if Ministers did not have offices here, they would spend more time in their Departments. When we did the interviews that I mentioned called “Ministers Reflect”, one of the questions we asked to a very wide range of Ministers was, “What was the pattern of your day?” Many of them actually came down here after lunch—they would obviously have to if there was a running Whip because they would be voting—so they could meet colleagues and so on, and civil servants would come over here during the afternoon. If you didn’t have those offices, that would become more difficult and might disconnect them more from Parliament, rather than connect them.

Q28 Chris Bryant: You sort of bring me on to my next question. One of the things that I don’t really understand—maybe you can enlighten me—is why we have more Government Ministers in this country than India, Australia and Canada put together.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: I’m not sure I can answer that. If I were being cynical, I would say that over the years—it has taken over 200 years—the Executive has progressively worked to get a tight hold on Parliament. One of the means by which that has been done is to

increase the size of the payroll vote. When you add Ministers and their Parliamentary Private Secretaries, that puts the Government in a very strong position in dealing with Parliament. I have long felt that junior Ministers, as they are called, are very often underused. They could be used better, and that would justify the numbers better. Other than that, I can't think of any terribly good reason why there should be the quantity of Ministers that there is.

Peter Riddell: Could I add to that? One of the interesting thing is that with devolution there was, as you well know, a reduction in the number of Ministers from Scotland, Wales and, ultimately, Northern Ireland. That was more than offset by an increase in the number of Ministers in other areas. For reasons of patronage and to keep everyone happy, we also had the bizarre phenomenon of unpaid Ministers and Whips. You still see it. It is absolutely nothing to do with parties. Successive Prime Ministers for the past 30 years have seen the attraction of creating more Ministers in that way.

Q29 Chris Bryant: Apart, to be fair, from David Cameron. I was just going to suggest that if we were to decant, which is a serious possibility, will 95 offices for Commons Ministers, plus Lords Ministers, on the estate be a priority during that period? We will be very hard pressed.

Peter Riddell: What would happen in the interim period is a slightly different question. I thought you were asking about what should happen—

Q30 Chris Bryant: When we are back in. I get that, but I am asking generally. In the interim, that is a lot of space if those rooms are used two afternoons a week.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Yes. I don't think you would reduce the number of Ministers just for that reason.

Chris Bryant: No. For other reasons.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: I think there might be other reasons. If space were a constraint, you could probably arrange a sort of hot-bedding arrangement, whereby Ministers shared offices.

Baroness Smith of Basildon: Probably hot-desking.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: In the days when there used to be all-night sittings, hot-bedding might have been a more appropriate term.

Q31 Lord Laming: If I may say so, you made a very strong point about preserving the link between Ministers and their Departments, as well as about their commitments here. We have two Houses, as you know. If we are to partially decant or wholly decant, what importance, if any, would you attach to the proximity of the temporary arrangements? In other words, if one went that way and one went a very long way that way, would you attach importance to that or would you think that we should not pay too much attention to it?

Lord Butler of Brockwell: I start from the position of wishing that the two Houses worked much more closely together and knew each other better. I think that the overall set-up of our Parliament is a good one. The House of Commons is the elected House and the main forum for political debate. It has primacy—and so it should have. The House of Lords performs a very useful but subsidiary role of being a reviewing House, where the party battle is not so strong, but the House can devote its expertise and experience to the close examination of legislation. I think it does that job very well, but these jobs are complementary to each other and sometimes I think that the two Houses don't work so closely together. So it is very welcome that this is an occasion where there is a Joint Committee, where the two Houses are looking at this issue together.

Peter Riddell: There was a period, of course—what was it; five or six years—when the House of Commons was bombed during the war, when the two Houses were physically apart. All right, it was only 10 minutes' walk apart. You can see the room in Church House where the Lords were; and of course the Lords was then both a smaller body of Peers who turned up, and a much less effective body. The Commons moved to the Lords. We have had periods of several years when there has been a physical difference—but it is a very different House. It is not the House that Robin Butler is describing.

I think it would obviously be desirable if there was proximity, but I do not think, for an interim period—and I accept that the interim period might be quite a long one—it is an absolute necessity, even though it is desirable to be reasonably close. It has happened in the past. Obviously, if you could find somewhere it would be much better, but I don't think it is an absolute necessity.

Q32 Baroness Smith of Basildon: I am quite interested in the comments you have made about both the relationship between the two Houses and the relationship of Ministers, Departments, Ministers' civil servants, the Executive and Parliament as a whole. If we decant and there is a major refurbishment, are there any things you think could be done to the physical environment of the Palace of Westminster that would assist in maintaining and improving those kinds of relationships?

Lord Butler of Brockwell: I do not think that there are. On the basis that the premise of your deliberations is that this will eventually be Parliament again, after the work that is being done, you could not really bring Parliament, and the House of Commons and the House of Lords, any closer than they are in the present building. I would, as I say, like to see more intermingling. It is extraordinary, really, what a separation that corridor through the Central Lobby produces. I do not think in that respect that I would look for any improvement. Obviously—and this was a subject, I think, of your previous evidence—there is quite a lot of technological improvement that could be made to the way in which Parliament works, but I do not really feel competent to comment on that.

Q33 Baroness Smith of Basildon: Proximity is the main thing for you.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Proximity is the main concern that I have, yes.

Peter Riddell: Not so much for the Executive—the civil service and Ministers—but certainly for the public, I think with the changes to the House there are improvements that can be made for public access compared with when the House was designed, in the mid-19th century; but I think for the point we are making I don't think there is terribly much on that.

Q34 Lord Deighton: You mentioned in your opening comments some problems with how other Governments operate—like Canberra, for example. Are there any lessons you think we should draw on the positive side from other countries, which could inform how we go through this exercise?

Peter Riddell: Well, I think there are two questions—about the exercise or how a Parliament should look afterwards.

Lord Deighton: I mean both.

Peter Riddell: On the exercise—and in talking to you I am preaching to the converted, Lord Deighton—as you know the Institute for Government did a lot of work on the Olympics and the Olympic Delivery Authority. We produced a report three years ago, with, indeed, your assistance, and you spoke when we launched it.

I think the really important lesson for Parliament in the experience you had is, essentially—when the politicians had defined the parameters of the project and, all right, revised the budget—leaving it to the delivery authority to deliver, in contrast to the millennium dome. There was a very interesting contrast between the Olympics and the millennium dome. With the dome there was constant interference and second guessing, which pushed the cost up and led to a less happy project than the one you were involved in.

I think there is a real lesson that you need to set up a delivery authority. Once you have taken the political decisions on what you are doing—things we have been discussing for the last quarter of an hour or 20 minutes: it is to actually have a delivery authority which gets on and does the project, does the budget. There is not an attempt, then, to second-guess and micromanage it. You reach your political decision—what you want; then let it do it.

On the other point, I think there are some successful examples. Even though it was way over cost, I actually like Holyrood. I think actually Holyrood works very well in terms of public access. It is very good. You have got security—you have got to go through security there. I think it works extremely well as an example of how a Parliament can work. I am not so sure about Cardiff, partly because there is a big physical division between the Senedd and the Welsh Government; it's about a mile and a half away. It works quite well, because it is a much smaller legislative body. The advantage is that you just have to walk up the hill, to St Andrew's House, in Edinburgh. As a building, Holyrood, despite all the problems with it, works rather well.

Baroness Smith of Basildon: I just declare an interest that I should have declared before. I am President of a charity called Youthbuild UK, which deals with apprenticeships.

Lord Deighton: I should declare an interest. I worked with James Bulley when we did the Olympics.

Q35 Neil Gray: Following on from that, I understand what the answer may be, but looking at what has been possible with Holyrood—having a modern Parliament set up for a modern Parliament function—do you think it was a mistake to leave out even a consideration of a new-build Parliament as part of this Committee’s deliberations? Even if it did not recommend having a new build at the end, was it a mistake not to include that as part of the deliberations?

Peter Riddell: I think it was not feasible in the context in which you are operating. I know you can argue, as was famously said—Lord Wallace will remember this, as well as you—the Scottish Parliament was reconvened in 1999, after having been adjourned in 1707. However, it was a sufficiently new institution, I think, for it to be regarded as new; I don’t think one would regard this as a new institution.

Q36 Lord Wallace of Tankerness: Following up on the point about the new institution, it was the first one that was properly elected. But there are things like electronic voting, so the Scottish Parliament—Holyrood—did not need to build in Division Lobbies. I am not suggesting you comment—you may wish to comment—on electronic voting, but are there particular things about the way we operate as a Parliament whereby when we have the opportunity of some refurbishment, we could improve the workings of Parliament?

Lord Butler of Brockwell: I have no suggestions in that respect.

Peter Riddell: It is up to you whether you want to move to electronic voting. There are all kinds of things you could do.

Lord Wallace of Tankerness: I wasn’t specifically—

Peter Riddell: No, but if you wanted to, it is perfectly feasible, even within the current building. I know this is for the next panel, but I think the issues are more to do with public access, in the broadest sense of the term—public access and engagement. Actually, there have been some pretty important innovations in the last few years. It is much better than it was, as I remember, but a lot more could be done to make the place more accessible and also more clearly to delineate what is for Members and what is for the public. I think you could take advantage of the work to make some changes there, as well as, obviously, dealing with access for the disabled and so on.

Q37 Mr Rees-Mogg: Lord Butler, may I ask you a follow-up question on your experience of visiting Ministers when they are in their parliamentary offices and being squeezed into small spaces? Do you think that the accommodation they have is sufficient for purpose, or they ought to have better, or do you think it is actually quite important to keep them marginally uncomfortable so that they don’t stay here all the time rather than going to their Departments, as in Australia?

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Yes, I think I take that latter view. I think it would be a pity if they spent more time here. Actually, one of the things that I think was an advantage of coming over here and all being a team of officials—all being very hugger-mugger with the

Minister—was that it did produce a sense of intimacy and teamwork, which I thought was rather important for the way in which we operated, so I don't think I would argue for Ministers being given more lavish accommodation.

Chair, could I make one other point in case we are running out of time? I make it particularly because there are two members of the Cabinet here. This obviously is a matter that you are quite rightly considering as a parliamentary Committee, but I do think that the Government has an interest in finding a satisfactory solution to this problem. The Government owns a lot of property around here. I'm sure the Departments individually are very defensive of it, but it seems to me that the Government has an obligation to seek a satisfactory solution to enable Parliament to work effectively during this period, in the interests of the UK as a whole.

Chris Grayling (Chair): Well, I can assure you, Lord Butler, that that is happening, so you don't need to be concerned. That does not mean that we always get exactly everything we want, but none the less a collaborative discussion is taking place. Gentlemen, if there are no further points to add, I thank you both very much for your time.

While we await the change of witnesses, the Chairman, Baroness Stowell, wants to declare an additional interest.

Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Chairman): I should have declared at the beginning that I had the great fortune of working with one of the next witnesses, Penny Young, while we were both working at the BBC, and she remains a personal friend.

Mr Rees-Mogg: On the subject of declarations of interest, I should say that Lord Butler and I are on a committee that gives money to the Oxford Union Society.

Chris Grayling (Chair): Thank you very much. I don't think that any of these declarations of interest are going to change the world, but it is important to get them on the record.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Professor Jonathan Drori CBE**, Chairman, Speaker's Advisory Council on Public Engagement, **Geoff Mulgan**, Chief Executive, NESTA, and **Penny Young**, Librarian and Director General, Information Services, House of Commons, and Chair of the Parliamentary Visitors Group, gave evidence.

Q38 Chris Grayling (Chair): Thank you very much indeed for joining us. Will the three of you start by introducing yourselves?

Ms Young: I am Penny Young. I am the House of Commons Librarian and I also lead the teams, most of them bicameral, that do work on engagement, visitor services, outreach and so on. I also chair the Parliamentary Visitors Group, which is a cross-Parliament group

designed to encourage and enhance visitor access and experience while being mindful of the impact on the core procedures of the House.

Professor Drori: Hello. It is an honour to be here and I thank you for having me. My name is Jonathan Drori. I am the former chair of the Speaker's Advisory Council on Public Engagement, which had a life of, basically, the previous Parliament. It was a group of people, mainly from the media and digital industries, with some marketing people, who were unpaid volunteers who advised on public engagement matters.

Mr Mulgan: Good afternoon. I am Mr Mulgan. I am Chief Executive of NESTA, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts.

Q39 Chris Grayling (Chair): Thank you very much. What do you think are the main barriers to interactions between the public and the workings of Parliament?

Professor Drori: There are four barriers. First is the lack of understanding on behalf of the public that I think is borne out by the market research done by the Hansard Society and others. Broadly, the public find it difficult to understand what goes on in Parliament—what the procedures are and what they mean. The way that they would learn about such things is at school, where they are not terribly well tested in this country. It is not a high priority like maths or English. Civics, for example, is pretty low down the agenda for many schools. There are a whole lot of things, including, as I will come to, the relevance of Parliament, that make it difficult for people to engage and therefore understand.

Second is the feeling of a lack of relevance. There are certain barriers. People enjoy the tradition of Parliament, but we know from market research that there are barriers to people feeling that it is relevant to them. First among those is how they can make a difference. There is the language, the dress, the traditions, the iconography, the design, the architecture, the febrile atmosphere—I could go on; indeed, I will go on for a second. The febrile atmosphere of the Chamber is a great spectacle. It is great fun but it really irritates a lot of people who feel that it is not relevant to them. Frankly, if I acted that way in my business life, I would probably have a shortened career. That is an issue.

Those things lead to the third point, which is a sort of mental inaccessibility. All those things compound together to make Parliament quite inaccessible to a lot of the public.

The fourth point is the physical inaccessibility. There are aspects of that that are absolutely vital because of security and so on, and I don't think anyone would complain about that, but there are ways of doing these things. Think about even the people who are invited to Parliament for semi-public events. These are the great and the good and you are asking them to stand in the rain for 20 minutes or more, and often longer. What hope for the rest? Compare that with some other places such as the Scottish Parliament, for example, or the Bundestag in Germany, which feel a lot more welcoming. All those things compound the situation.

Ms Young: I would add, in terms of the lack of understanding, that something that the public really do not understand as much as we would like is that Parliament is different from

Government, the role of Parliament in holding the Government to account and the distinct role of the two Houses, and that is both a problem and an opportunity.

The public also do not understand as well as we would like the impact that they can have. In this respect, the role of the Petitions Committee is a really good example of how Parliament is changing. There have been 10 million signatures since it launched in July, with 800,000 on the latest petition. It was recently described as the new public front door to Parliament in terms of the things that we can hang off the Petitions Committee. That is not to say that the building does not have a really important role, and I am sure we will come on to that later.

Mr Mulgan: I will not repeat what others have said. It is worth being clear that Parliament was not designed to be very open to the public. That was not foremost in the thoughts of people in the mid-19th century. There is a physical aspect to this, as Jonathan said. Many more recent Parliaments have been deliberately designed to be much more porous. They have events run by the public as well as by Parliament itself. Their feel is more welcoming; they have more light and openness.

The thing I want to emphasise is more on the digital side. The citizens of Britain, in their daily lives, are used to having interactions with organisations—whether for shopping, banking, sports, music or news—which are predominantly digital nowadays. There will also be a face-to-face, physical aspect to them. If you had been meeting five or 10 years ago, there were not many options for you in that respect—there might have been petition sites, and the first ones were a decade or so ago—there are now quite a lot of tools that you could use, and which other Parliaments and cities are beginning to use. These make it easier for citizens to take part in almost every stage of the parliamentary process—by pointing out issues, proposing ideas, commenting on legislation, taking part in debates on legislation and playing a part in scrutiny.

One of the things that my organisation has been involved in is helping to design those tools, which are in use in countries such as Spain, Finland and Iceland, and I think they should be part of your discussion. They are not the answer to everything. They are not replacements for the physical proximity of Parliament and for the intensity and intimacy of debate, but I think it is almost impossible now to conceive of either a decanted Parliament or a rebuilt Parliament without the digital being absolutely integral to how you think about every aspect of it. Architects nowadays, as indeed in many other walks of life, have to think about the digital and the physical in the same breath almost.

Q40 Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Chairman): There is so much ground to cover that it is quite hard to know where to start, to be honest with you, given what you have described in terms of the digital opportunities. If the biggest barrier to Parliament is people's understanding, how do you see—because we are concerned about the physical aspects of a restoration and renewal project, and that is not to say that digital is not something that would need to feature in whatever it is that would form part of a redesign down the line—thinking more about the physical access to Parliament and addressing the barriers to understanding, what would you give most priority to?

Ms Young: It is really important to understand that people who come into the building in whatever capacity—whether it is the quarter of a million people who have paid to come on a commercial tour, the 120,000 people who have come on a Member-sponsored tour, the 11,000 people who go up Big Ben, the 60,000 schoolkids who will come through the building this year or the 100,000 next year, or those in the Public Galleries; there are all sorts of people—are really wowed by the place. While it is absolutely true that engaging digitally is important, the actual experience of coming in the building and experiencing both the culture and engaging as citizens really has a positive impact on people. We know that from research, so one of things is letting people know that they can come in. That is a really important thing. One of the problems with the galleries is that most people do not know that they can turn up, queue and come in—there will then obviously be the problems about having to queue. The first thing is to understand that that rich experience really binds people to an understanding of what Parliament is about rather more, so while digital is fantastically important, the building has a really important role to play as well.

Q41 Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Chairman): What would be the thing that you feel, if you were looking at the building as it is now, you would give as a priority to change in terms of access to the building for the public?

Ms Young: There are probably three things. One is queues, and we can come on to that in a moment. One is the commercial perspective. If someone is coming in as a visitor, there are all sorts of things such as a one-way route, lockers, interpretation and signage. The lack of interpretation around the building is startling compared with what you would see in other buildings. It is also about citizen space, which helps Members of Parliament and Peers—spaces where you can engage with citizens. We have heard about Holyrood, and it is also true of other Parliaments. For example, if we were to cover over the courtyards and make much more informal space, that is a way that citizens, their representatives and Peers can engage much more. I gather that one of the few things that Holyrood might do rather differently is with the informal collaborative space. It has worked really well, but there is a recognition that it is under pressure. In a sense, you cannot build in too much informal collaborative space for citizens and their representatives to engage in more informal ways.

Professor Drori: In the same way that if I understood you rightly, Geoff, you said that ideally you would design the digital and physical together—if that is what you said, I absolutely concur—I would say that just thinking about the present footprint of the Parliamentary Estate may not be the ideal place to start. I cannot think that those who look at Parliament Square think of it as a world-beating wonderful space that we are all proud of, yet that space absolutely could be the most fantastic thing in Europe, if you wanted it to be, or if enough people wanted it to be. I do not hear that case being made, although I have seen designs commissioned by the Hansard Society and others that incorporate quite imaginative use of that space. At the moment, it is a bit of a traffic island and embarrassing.

Q42 Chris Grayling (Chair): I am not sure that we could add it to St Peter's.

Mr Mulgan: Could I perhaps suggest three questions about the very specific physical fabric of Parliament and how you might design it? There is one set of issues about underlying

shape. Do you want the classic antagonistic form? Do you want circles or semicircles and so on? To a degree, where one goes is a matter of taste. Almost all the new Parliaments of the past 30 years have not followed the Westminster model, but there is no reason not to keep what we have.

The second set is the basic question of whether you allow mixing of people in the House itself in the way that we are doing here. Some Parliaments allow citizens or experts or others to come and take part in the actual conversations of a Chamber. Others, like this one, do not. To my mind, that is one rather important signal about a more open, porous conversational Parliament.

The third set of questions is about the physical fabric—things like walls. Do you have screens? Do you make it possible, when you are discussing fisheries policy, to beam in people from fishing communities across the country? Do you have data ever on show? Almost all buildings being designed now for boards, committees and so on automatically replace the wonderful paintings of this kind with fabric that is much more interactive, much more engaged and much more informative, to help the discussions be of a higher quality.

Q43 Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Chairman): So that suggests that in your mind, when you think about restoration and renewal, coming from where you are—this is a grade I listed building, so you will understand that there are huge constraints—that you envisage something radically different in terms of the internal aspects of this building on return. It would be quite different, I would guess, for most of us sitting round this table.

Professor Drori: It depends what you want to do. If you really want to engage people, the market research is very clear about the things that are distancing them and how they feel about Parliament just not really reflecting the rest of business life. It may be that you want to go down the “this is tradition, this is the most important bit of what we do” route, in which case you will not change it, but if you wanted to have that effect on the public, the answer is pretty clear from market research.

Mr Mulgan: To my mind, it is partly about engagement of the public, so that democracy is legible and understandable. The other part is tapping into expertise. There are 60 million people out there with deep knowledge of almost everything discussed in the House. One of the things that many other Parliaments and Governments are working on is ways of tapping into specialist expertise on a much larger scale than in the past, and again using digital tools to do so.

Q44 Lord Wallace of Tankerness: From my own experience, I always thought the Supreme Court did rather well. Visitors there get a synopsis of the cases. Here, you come in and you see a great list of Committee Rooms, but you don’t have a clue what is going on in any of them, not to mention the Chambers. There is a balance between innovative practice and the physical, but do you think there is scope for visitors coming here to be given some indication of what is going on—for example, for people coming into this Committee at this moment to know what it is we are discussing?

Professor Drori: It is a bit like waiting for the headmaster outside this room.

Q45 Lord Wallace of Tankerness: Do you think that that would have much of an impact on the physical requirements of the building?

Professor Drori: Yes. My observation, from having been around Parliament as an observer of it, is that your own staff here who work in the education and outreach departments have exactly the right instincts but probably not the resources to do it, so I would listen to them.

Ms Young: That is being done. There are quite a lot of interesting experiments going on—for example, Twitter debates ahead of, to date, second Chamber debates. We will be seeing the first one for a main Chamber debate later this week; the Twitter debate happened last week on gang violence, so that experience can now get referred to in the House. I appreciate that it is not as radical as what Geoff is talking about, but we are experimenting with those things.

Mr Mulgan: It will always be a tiny proportion of people who will be able to physically come into a Committee Room or into Parliament, so I would say that the answers have to be 95% digital and only 5% physical in that respect. What we have been doing in Helsinki with the city is a very simple idea where you create an open API, so that anyone who is interested in a particular topic is told as soon as that topic is coming up in a committee discussion or a parliamentary debate. They get that in a classic online form or video feeds and so on. Things like that would have far more effect on the daily experience of Parliament than almost anything you could do to the physical structure on its own.

Ms Young: We are sort of almost there. There is not much more that needs to be done. On Parliamentlive.tv, all the proceedings are broadcast. They are clippable and they are embeddable. Other people will invent tools and apps that allow them to be shared. We will do them as well, but in terms of the curation of those things and the editorialising, we are pushing out a lot more content than we did even a year or so ago.

Q46 Baroness Smith of Basildon: I was struck by one of the things you said at the beginning, Penny. You talked about the wow factor when people come into Parliament. It strikes me that part of that is that this is a working Parliament. It is not just a building; there is activity going on here. It may not be that we can be quite as radical—“Very courageous, Minister,” came to mind when you were talking.

While people are not in the building or on visits here, we could be giving them far more information. In terms of Parliament on TV, we only have one parliamentary channel for Parliament that shows one House of Parliament at a time. It does not look at committees and it does not look at both Houses. On American TV, I think C-SPAN now has four channels; it is far more. By the way, my husband was watching Parliament TV last week and it was sound only; he could not even get a picture on it.

Is there more we could do to provide greater access? Could we work with outside organisations or encourage them to do more so that there is greater access? If there was greater knowledge about what is happening, that would help in terms of the physical changes we can make.

Ms Young: That is right. Obviously, it is primarily a matter for the broadcasters in terms of what channels there are and how much space they are giving it. Increasingly, the distinction between television and online is lessening, so the fact that we are already webcasting everything is—it will be a non-problem in due course.

Your point about communication is well made. There is a lot more we can do to bring together the messages we are sending about the House and to do things in more interesting ways. We can also provide even more information and material for, for example, MPs out in the constituencies, because that has a real multiplier effect in terms of the engagement Members have with constituents. That is probably going to be more than we can ever do. We just have to be a bit bolder and more assertive about our communications.

Q47 Baroness Smith of Basildon: As a follow-up question, if people want to come into committees or the Chamber to watch proceedings, is there adequate access? In Berlin, for example, you can walk round the wonderful Foster dome and see things happening. Now, I don't think we have the remit or the structure to be able to do something like that, but do we have adequate capacity at present or should we increase it?

Ms Young: In terms of the Chambers themselves, again the key issue is that people do not really know that they can do that. They do not know that it is free. About 140,000 people come and visit one of the Galleries each year. Queuing can be a problem, particularly at busy times. It is much less bad than it was since the investment took place, but it is still an issue that needs sorting out as part of this project. For example, there were nearly 40 instances of the 15-minute queue time being breached during sitting days in 2015, which is 40 too many. Ultimately, however, the Galleries are under-utilised. It is only really at PMQs and the really big moments that the public galleries are full.

Again, people are not going to come very often, but how often do you need to come in your lifetime for it to be a really stimulating, thought-provoking, enhancing experience to have been at the seat of the UK Parliament actually seeing a debate happen? It complements everything else. If we can get more people in and tell them more about it, that in itself will enhance the public's relationship with Parliament.

Professor Drori: As for the committees, they are already doing good work in trying to be in places other than this building, which certainly helps. It helps to be geographically closer to the action for some people, but also, as I said, this building is inaccessible in many ways, and not just because of the security. You have the same problem here that many museums and galleries went through in the 1980s. If you asked anyone outside the National Gallery what the building was, they might say, "A bank? I don't know." It didn't feel like it was their space. The museums and galleries have made enormous strides in the last 30 years in terms of putting out a clear message that they are for and owned by the public. I think Parliament perhaps needs to learn some of those lessons from that sector.

Mr Mulgan: The public nowadays like to see the work behind the scenes. When we go to a restaurant, we like there to be glass windows so that we can see the chefs at work, which is a big change of culture. I think that applies to the work of legislation and debate. The more that you can open up the incomplete work, the more the public will have a feeling of what is going on. That can apply to almost every aspect of the design we are talking about.

Q48 Chris Bryant: Where would you sit on the spectrum between just doing what is necessary to keep the building from burning down or falling down, which is zero, and refashioning the building as much as you possibly can so as to future-proof for the 23rd century, which is 10?

Professor Drori: The difficult bit there is “as much as you possibly can”. There is a judgment to be made about how much it is worth spending. If money was no object, which is not the case, I would be interested in being nearer the 8 or 9 end of the spectrum, but I can absolutely see that, for all sorts of reasons, that would be a difficult decision for you to recommend.

The value of Parliament is more than just as a place where people are working, debating, passing laws and so on. It actually has an economic value to any of us who do business abroad, for example. Britain is very much still seen as a relatively powerful country that has the rule of law, is still reasonably uncorrupt—

Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Chairman): You’re hardly selling us.

Professor Drori: It is a place with high-quality institutions and one that people in many places kind of aspire to be like. *[Interruption.]*

Chris Grayling (Chair): Can I just pause you there? We have a Division in the House of Lords, so we will have to take a momentary break. If you will forgive us, we will suspend and twiddle our thumbs for five to 10 minutes.

The Committee suspended for a Division in the House of Lords

On resuming—

Q49 Chris Grayling (Chair): We will make a start again.

Professor Drori: I was making the point that there is an economic benefit as well as a social one to Parliament’s restoration being slightly more on the 7, 8, 9 end of the scale rather than the 1, 2, 3 end. One of the things that Parliament and the UK have in their favour at the moment is that this Parliament is regarded highly as one of the country’s institutions. It represents a country which has wealth and power and is uncorrupt and good to deal with. These things make doing business abroad easier. Quite apart from the fact that it is a tourist attraction and everything else, it is what the place stands for. I think that openness and transparency of a modern democracy is worth paying for, quite apart from the social value of our own population regarding its democracy more highly. I would not take democracy for granted.

Q50 Chris Bryant: My anxiety would be that if a foreign visitor comes to this building, they will not normally have a tour in their own language. Most tours are in English. You have to go on a fixed route; you are not able to go on your own version—in fact, if an MP tries to take somebody around in a different order, some of the doorkeepers, although

some of them have gone now, can be phenomenally rude—and it is not always necessarily enlightening. I would say that some of the historical facts presented as such are not.

Professor Drori: I was suggesting that some of the exterior spaces might be designed in such a way that even if people are not coming on tours inside the building, there are things they can do with the exterior space, even if you did not have Parliament Square at your disposal. If you did, what wonders you could make.

Q51 Chris Bryant: I think Penny wants to contest everything I have just said.

Ms Young: I will take the feedback, thank you very much. I would like to correct you on the language point. We do have foreign-language guided tours—

Q52 Baroness Smith of Basildon: With headphones.

Ms Young: Are they audio guides? Definitely both.

Back to the question about whether it should be 1 or 10, of course, it is really difficult. It is an eye-watering amount of public money, whatever is done. We know the public have issues with politicians and with Parliament—it is not as strong a relationship as we would like—but if the money only goes on things they cannot really see, then it is going to seem like the money is just being spent for the workplace of politicians. It is the marginal spend on extra things that has the potential to deliver a public legacy. Even though it is extra money, that is where the additional value can come from.

Look to what other Parliaments have done, including Parliaments like Canada, which is also saddled—not “saddled”—with the problem of neo-Gothic and turning it into an opportunity. It is hard to find somewhere that has not taken the opportunity when doing this type of project to have a dedicated visitor centre and a dedicated education centre—ours has planning permission for only 10 years—and to sort out the problems of things like lockers and accessibility. We haven’t talked much about disabled access, for example—

Q53 Chris Bryant: We have talked lots.

Ms Young: Okay. It is just a reminder that basically a wheelchair user cannot go through the Chamber. You have to look from either end because your wheelchair may not get through. You can’t go into St Stephen’s Hall because there are steps at either end. There are very basic issues that need sorting out.

I think the message is that, rather than doing it for the politicians, we are doing it to improve engagement with citizens and the work we do for you, and to use it to explain that Parliament is about voice and about scrutiny.

Q54 Chris Bryant: Quickly on the decant, if we have to decant, how important is it that the public access to the decant Chamber is as full as that to the present one and for some kind of understanding of the work that is happening in the building?

Ms Young: There are several points there. I think citizens will still expect some sort of access to the actual proceedings, challenging as that is. It would be a real shame to miss a cohort of schoolchildren and to say we are not going to do any education for five, six, seven or however many years it is. It is really important to have some kind of education provision if the education centre is not usable.

There is a whole set of opportunities for how we can use restoration and renewal as a way to rebuild/build the relationship with the public. We know what other visitor attractions have done. Kensington Palace, for example, turned it into a very interesting immersion experience, using theatre to bring stories to life. There may be something we could do there. Obviously the Olympics did a lot to show people what was going on, but it is about much more than that. It is about the next stage of consultation and really involving the public in ways that say: what it could actually look like and what could be the benefit to different groups of people? It is not just about what happens when the building work gets under way; it is about using it as an opportunity to communicate what Parliament is about.

Professor Drori: I just wanted to add that the process of engaging with the public about this programme of restoration and renewal is itself quite important. There is plenty of technology around that planners and architects use and that can be used to engage members of the public in the process of design and consultation. That means they will be much less likely to be critical when a decision is announced. It is not just to allay the sort of criticism you are bound to get, whatever you do, but to engage people and make them feel part of the process. That is very much philosophically what some of us here are trying to say.

Mr Mulgan: Briefly, for me the key question is whether this place remains a model as a Parliament and whether the quality of deliberation is seen to be a model as it was when it was built in the mid-19th century. The very best technology, tools and architectural ideas of the era were used and it was seen as being integral to Britain and the very best version of democracy. In a way, that might be the lens through which to look at every element of the budget: how much will it improve the quality of this as a democratic institution? Many of the things I described are very cheap compared with what you could spend on building all sorts of things, many of which I think would have almost no impact whatever on how the British public or the world public see this as a model of what democracy should be.

Lord Laming: Penny described visitors' reactions as being wild and in awe of their visits here, which is wonderful in lots of ways, but it means that both the outside and inside of the building need to be preserved to have that sort of impact and reaction. In any event, because it is listed and there are all sorts of restrictions on what can be done, we are never going to have the freedom of a new Scottish Parliament or of big changes such as happened in Berlin, or indeed at the British Museum, but there may be possibilities. I am interested in whether you think, given the limitations on physical changes both within and outside the immediate building, there are lots of things we can do. I am sure we will be able to make it better for disabled people, and I am sure we will make it better for an education centre and a visitor centre, but on the things you were talking about earlier in terms of helping people see what is happening inside the building, it will be much more difficult.

Professor Drori: You mentioned the Reichstag; they put a significant amount of glass on top, but kept the main fabric of the exterior of the building, for good or ill. The general public who watch or listen to this session might wonder, “If this is Parliament, you make the laws; why are you limited in what you can do with the fabric of the building?” Without wanting to tear the place down, maybe there are small additions or changes that you could make—moving a doorway here or there—that might make the place much more appealing. People might think that, given that you make the laws, couldn’t you do something about it?

There is also the possibility, as Geoff mentioned earlier, of doing much more with screens around the place and additions generally that do not necessarily alter the fabric of the building and need not be terribly expensive.

Mr Mulgan: You probably do not want to override English Heritage, but all of you have a smartphone in your hands. Some of you look at it regularly. The other option is to just use an augmented reality tool. For a committee like this, you would just look at the screen. It would have information about each of you, about the debate, about all sorts of background, and could remodel what the room actually looks like. There are lots of ways of thinking about this that were not there even five years ago, and are much cheaper than trying to persuade English Heritage to allow you to fill in the windows.

Ms Young: I should have said, to build on the point, that when people come and they are really wowed—it is genuinely awe-inspiring—they also leave as advocates, even more so than when they came. That is important to say.

Canada is in the process of doing the British Museum thing: covering over courtyards and making more informal collaborative spaces. That is quite important in itself. We are already using augmented reality in the education centre, which has 10 years’ planning permission. We will need a permanent facility at some point. I absolutely concur that we can do more there.

One thing that has not been talked about—this is just for information—is the Victoria Tower, where the archives are. That is quite a big space, so probably the biggest opportunity to think about whether there are lessons to learn from the Reichstag in doing something really bold may be around the Victoria Tower. Lots of problems, lots of challenges; I just float that thought. Those are the main points that I wanted to make.

Mr Mulgan: Why do you have only 10 years in the education centre?

Ms Young: It has planning permission for only 10 years. It is a building that will last a lot longer. It is not only English Heritage, but Westminster Council.

Chris Bryant: We can’t plan on that.

Chris Grayling (Chair): It is highly unlikely that in 10 years’ time we will not have an education centre.

If there are no other points, thank you all for coming.