



## Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster: Summary of Commons Debate

On 31 January 2018, the House of Commons debated the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster. Below is a short summary of that debate ahead of the corresponding debate in the House of Lords, including the text of the motions tabled by the Leader of the House of Commons, and of those amendments which were moved to a division during the course of the debate. For reasons of brevity, amendments not selected or not moved to a division are omitted.

### Motions and Amendments Moved to Division

The Leader of the House, Andrea Leadsom, tabled two motions for debate: the Restoration and Renewal (No 1) motion, and a second Restoration and Renewal (No 2) motion, should the first not be agreed to. The Restoration and Renewal (No 1) motion stated:

That this House –

1. affirms its commitment to the historic Palace of Westminster and its unique status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Royal Palace and home of our Houses of Parliament;
2. takes note of the report of the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster ‘Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster’, HL Paper 41, HC 659;
3. accepts that there is a clear and pressing need to repair the services in the Palace of Westminster in a comprehensive and strategic manner to prevent catastrophic failure in this Parliament, whilst acknowledging the demand and burden on public expenditure and fiscal constraints at a time of prudence and restraint;
4. accepts in principle that action should be taken and funding should be limited to facilitate essential work to the services in this Parliament;
5. agrees to review before the end of the Parliament the need for comprehensive works to take place.<sup>1</sup>

An explanatory memorandum on the motions stated that the No 1 motion “accepts, in principle, that only essential works to the services of the Palace of Westminster should take place during the course of this Parliament”, which would in practice mean planned and reactive maintenance, Strategic Estates projects and programmes which were already in progress (including the Elizabeth Tower, cast iron roofs and Westminster Hall), and a further round of medium-term mechanical and electrical work required to mitigate the risks of catastrophic building failure.<sup>2</sup> The No 1 motion would have required there to be a review before the end of the Parliament of whether there was a need for a comprehensive programme of work.

The Restoration and Renewal (No 2) motion would have stated comprehensive work would commence “as early as possible in the next decade” and provided for the creation of a sponsor board and delivery authority to commission and oversee the work required. It also would require the forerunner (or ‘shadow’) of such a sponsor board and delivery authority to conduct an analysis on

what type of decant model was preferred:

That this House—

1. affirms its commitment to the historic Palace of Westminster as the permanent home of both Houses of Parliament;
2. takes note of the report of the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster ‘Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster’, HL Paper 41, HC 659;
3. agrees that there is a clear and pressing need to repair the services in the Palace of Westminster in a comprehensive and strategic manner to prevent catastrophic failure; including steps to safeguard the safety of visitors, schoolchildren, staff and members;
4. notes that works in the Palace should commence as early as possible in the next decade;
5. authorises necessary preliminary work required to avoid unnecessary delay, without prejudice to a parliamentary decision on the preferred option;
6. endorses the Joint Committee’s recommendation that a Sponsor Board and Delivery Authority be established by legislation to commission and oversee the work required, and the establishment of a joint Commission to lay estimates;
7. agrees that steps be taken now to establish a shadow Sponsor Board and shadow Delivery Authority, and to ensure that its members have a range of relevant expertise;
8. instructs the shadow Sponsor Board and Delivery Authority to undertake a sufficiently thorough and detailed analysis of the three options of full decant, partial decant and retaining a parliamentary foothold in the Palace during a full decant; to decide whether each option properly balances costs and benefits, and whether or not the identified risks can be satisfactorily mitigated; to prepare a business case for the preferred option for the approval of both Houses of Parliament; and thereafter to proceed to the design phase;
9. instructs the shadow Sponsor Board and Delivery Authority to apply high standards of cost-effectiveness and demonstrate value for money, and to include measures to ensure: the repair and replacement of mechanical and electrical services, fire safety improvement works, the removal of asbestos, repairs to the external and internal fabric of the Palace, the removal of unnecessary and unsightly accretions to the Palace, the improvement of visitor access including the provision of new educational and other facilities for visitors and full access for people with disabilities;
10. instructs the shadow Sponsor Board and Delivery Authority to ensure the security of Members, Peers, staff, and visitors both during and after the work;
11. affirms that in any event the delivery option must ensure that both Houses will return to their historic Chambers after any essential period of temporary absence.<sup>3</sup>

For the Scottish National Party, Pete Wishart (MP for Perth and North Perthshire) moved amendment (c) to the Restoration and Renewal (No 1) motion, the effect of which would be to provide for the future review of the need for a comprehensive programme of works to cover the potential benefits of relocating Parliament away from Westminster:

At end of paragraph (2), insert:

‘(2A) regrets that no detailed assessment has been carried out of the cost-effectiveness of relocating Parliament away from the Palace of Westminster, and calls for any future review to include such an assessment.’<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, Meg Hillier (Labour MP for Hackney South and Shoreditch), moved amendment (b) to the Restoration and Renewal (No 1) motion, which would endorse the proposal for a “full and timely decant” of the Palace; provide that expenditure on the

Palace during this Parliament would be limited to essential work and preparatory work for the comprehensive works envisaged; and endorse the creation of a Sponsor Board and Delivery Authority, and a forerunner shadow board and authority, who should report back to Parliament with a “realistic timetable” for the duration of the work:

Delete paragraphs (4) and (5) and at end add:

‘(4) accordingly endorses the unanimous conclusion of the Joint Committee that a full and timely decant of the Palace is the best and the most cost-effective delivery option, as endorsed by the Public Accounts Committee and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority;

(5) accepts that expenditure on the Palace during this Parliament will be limited to preparatory work for the comprehensive programme of works envisaged, together with works essential to ensure the continuing functioning of the Palace;

(6) endorses the Joint Committee’s recommendation that a Sponsor Board and Delivery Authority be established by legislation to develop a business case and costed programme for the work to be approved by both Houses of Parliament, and to commission and oversee the work required, and that immediate steps be taken now to establish a shadow sponsor Board and Delivery Authority;

(7) instructs the shadow Sponsor Board and Delivery Authority and their statutory successors to apply high standards of cost-effectiveness and demonstrate value for money in the business case, to report back to Parliament with up to date costings and a realistic timetable for the duration of the work, and to include measures to ensure: the repair and replacement of mechanical and electrical services, fire safety improvement works, the removal of asbestos, repairs to the external and internal fabric of the Palace, the removal of unnecessary and unsightly accretions to the Palace, the improvement of visitor access including the provision of new educational and other facilities for visitors and full access for people with disabilities;

(8) affirms that the guarantee that both Houses will return to their historic Chambers as soon as possible should be incorporated in primary legislation.<sup>5</sup>

## Summary of the Debate

Introducing the motions tabled in her name, Andrea Leadsom set out the scale of the work required on the Palace, drawing upon the findings of the Joint Committee on Restoration and Renewal:

The Palace of Westminster is the seat of our democracy, an iconic, world-famous building—and it is in dire need of repair. Both motions and all amendments on the Order Paper recognise the need for that work. Anyone who has read the report of the Joint Committee will be aware of the two core difficulties we face. The first is one that none of us can shy away from: the costs associated with a programme of works of this magnitude will be significant. While it is our responsibility to safeguard this UNESCO world heritage site, it is equally our responsibility to ensure value for taxpayers’ money. We have been clear that there can be no blank cheque for this work, and value for taxpayers’ money will frame the choices we make today.

The second issue is the state of disrepair within this building. The issue is not a structural one. [...] The problem, rather, is the services infrastructure that supports the ever-increasing and shifting demands of Parliament—and it is under considerable strain. Since 1850, we have developed the hotch-potch of pipework and wiring to such an extent that our essential services are now aging faster than it is possible to repair them. Much of the building is supported by infrastructure that is still in place decades after the substantial rebuild of the Palace following the second world war.<sup>6</sup>

Mrs Leadsom also confirmed in her opening remarks that Conservative MPs would be offered a free vote on the motions. John Spellar (Labour MP for Warley) also suggested this would also be true for Labour MPs.<sup>7</sup> The Leader of the House then spelled out what she believed were the appropriate next steps in the restoration and renewal process, and the rationale behind the first motion:

This motion recognises that, given the scale of the challenge ahead of us, Members must first consider the vast cost associated with any programme of work. With competing demands on our public services, and calls for capital investment in other areas, Parliament will want to think carefully about the impact this will have on the taxpayer, and may ultimately choose to limit spending on the Palace to essential repairs. The case for further work to be done is, however, compelling, and it is important that we do not impede future progress in any decision made today. So this first option also agrees to reviewing the need for comprehensive works before the next general election.

The full cost of an R and R programme under this scenario would not be incurred until late into the next decade.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, Mrs Leadsom outlined how the second motion tabled in her name would create a sponsor board and delivery authority which would evaluate the potential decant models, but would not commit to a particular course of action:

The second motion seeks to establish an Olympic-style delivery authority, overseen by a sponsor board that will have a majority of members who are parliamentarians. That would produce up-to-date, fully costed proposals for the restoration and renewal as soon as possible. The establishment of an Olympic-style delivery authority with external professionals, will guard against unacceptable cost and timetable overruns of the sort that we saw with the Elizabeth Tower refurbishment.

[...]

[T]he sponsor board and delivery authority must consider three options: first, full decant; second, partial decant with access to one Chamber at all times; and third, full decant with a parliamentary foothold, allowing for parliamentary access during the works, such as to Westminster Hall and Elizabeth Tower. It is important to note that the second motion before the House today does not commit to a final decision. By asking a delivery authority to further evaluate those three options, parliamentarians and the public can be confident that the delivery authority will take into account the risks, costs and benefits of each approach, as well as accommodating the needs of our parliamentary democracy, before recommending its final, preferred, fully costed option in 12 to 18 months' time. Motion 2 allows those who support the Joint Committee's recommendations to see them properly stress-tested.

Addressing Meg Hillier's amendment directly (amendment b), Mrs Leadsom added:

Motion 2 differs from amendment (b) to motion 1 in two key ways. First, the amendment recommends a single option of full decant. The first problem with this is the lack of decant accommodation available to us under the current plans until 2025. The amendment does not allow us to proceed any quicker with a full programme of work than motion 2 allows for. The second problem is the fact that the Joint Committee report itself acknowledged that, while recommending full decant, it had not fully costed that option. The amendment to motion 1 therefore does not settle the issue of value for taxpayers' money.<sup>9</sup>

The Shadow Leader of the House, Valerie Vaz, then rose to offer her support for Meg Hillier's amendment, which Mrs Vaz contended offered the possibility of an "immediate decision", and in so doing outlined what she believed were the three issues at the heart of the debate. The first was the reports published by the Joint Committee and Public Accounts Committee which endorsed the principle of a full decant. The second was new security as well as safety considerations which the restoration and renewal programme would need to incorporate, and thirdly was the governance of the project. Consequently, Mrs Vaz endorsed the need for a delivery authority and sponsor board, but also that there was a need to ensure the appropriate expertise, resource and oversight mechanisms were in place for that model to work effectively.<sup>10</sup>

Speaking to his amendment (amendment c), Pete Wishart commented on the cost of the proposed programme of repairs, and argued if that money could be better spent on making the Palace of Westminster a tourist attraction and creating a new Parliamentary building fit "for the 21st Century".<sup>11</sup>

Sir Edward Leigh was one of the members to raise the question of the provision of alternative accommodation in the event of a decant, particularly regarding the creation of an alternative Chamber(s). Noting he was in favour of repair work being undertaken sooner rather than later, still Sir Edward maintained MPs could be required to sit in an alternate location for "10–12 years" and questioned whether adequate consideration had been given to alternative venues, particularly given the challenges involved in developing the Richmond House site (a point also raised by Jacob Rees-Mogg (Conservative MP for North East Somerset)).<sup>12</sup> Sir Edward further questioned whether a full decant was the most cost-effective solution, given the costs published as part of the report produced by Deloitte in particular, and instead advocated a solution whereby the House of Commons Chamber would remain in the Palace (either by utilising the House of Lords Chamber, or alternative solutions) for the duration of the works.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Stephen Pound (Labour MP for Ealing North) was in favour of Members continuing to work on the estate and the work being carried out on a rolling basis.

In contrast, Mark Tami (Labour MP for Alyn and Deeside), a member of the Joint Committee on Restoration and Renewal, said he had been persuaded of the merits for a full decant not only on the grounds of cost, but on safety and security. The merits of a full decant were echoed by Caroline Spelman (Conservative MP for Meriden) who suggested Church House would provide suitable alternative accommodation, and by Meg Hillier in rising to speak to her amendment (amendment b). Outlining the rationale for her amendment, Mrs Hillier recognised that further work was required on the requirements and costings of the restoration and renewal proposals, including the provision of alternative accommodation, but argued a "firm decision" was needed so such work could be undertaken, stating:

That is why I propose a [full] decant, because we know moving the project quickly, specifying it well and doing it over a short period of time will be a lot cheaper.<sup>14</sup>

Drawing on correspondence from David Orr and Jennifer Wood, external members of the Palace of Westminster restoration and renewal programme board, on the implications of further delay in action being taken, Mrs Hillier contended the building was "at risk" unless a decision was taken, and suggested her amendment would provide for a fully costed programme of works to be developed.<sup>15</sup>

Speaking for the House Commission, and specifically with regard to the alternative provision being developed on the Richmond House site, Tom Brake (Liberal Democrat MP for Carshalton and Wallington) noted proposals for an interim Chamber in the courtyard of Richmond House had

developed to a more ambitious plan for the construction of a contingency Chamber available for use in the longer term, as agreed with the House of Commons Commission in September.<sup>16</sup> It is planned such development will include the construction of lobbies, business offices as well as office space for Members and staff currently accommodated in the Palace.

At the culmination of the debate, the Leader of the House moved Restoration and Renewal (No 1) motion, and the House voted first on amendment (c) tabled by Pete Wishart, which was defeated by 410 votes to 47.<sup>17</sup> The House then divided on Meg Hillier's amendment (amendment b), which was passed by 236 votes to 220.<sup>18</sup> The main motion, as amended, was then carried by 234 votes to 185,<sup>19</sup> with the House therefore agreeing to the following:

That this House—

- (1) affirms its commitment to the historic Palace of Westminster and its unique status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Royal Palace and home of our Houses of Parliament;
- (2) takes note of the report of the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster 'Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster', HL Paper 41, HC 659;
- (3) accepts that there is a clear and pressing need to repair the services in the Palace of Westminster in a comprehensive and strategic manner to prevent catastrophic failure in this Parliament, whilst acknowledging the demand and burden on public expenditure and fiscal constraints at a time of prudence and restraint;
- (4) accordingly endorses the unanimous conclusion of the Joint Committee that a full and timely decant of the Palace is the best and the most cost-effective delivery option, as endorsed by the Public Accounts Committee and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority;
- (5) accepts that expenditure on the Palace during this Parliament will be limited to preparatory work for the comprehensive programme of works envisaged, together with works essential to ensure the continuing functioning of the Palace;
- (6) endorses the Joint Committee's recommendation that a Sponsor Board and Delivery Authority be established by legislation to develop a business case and costed programme for the work to be approved by both Houses of Parliament, and to commission and oversee the work required, and that immediate steps be taken now to establish a shadow sponsor Board and Delivery Authority;
- (7) instructs the shadow Sponsor Board and Delivery Authority and their statutory successors to apply high standards of cost-effectiveness and demonstrate value for money in the business case, to report back to Parliament with up to date costings and a realistic timetable for the duration of the work, and to include measures to ensure: the repair and replacement of mechanical and electrical services, fire safety improvement works, the removal of asbestos, repairs to the external and internal fabric of the Palace, the removal of unnecessary and unsightly accretions to the Palace, the improvement of visitor access including the provision of new educational and other facilities for visitors and full access for people with disabilities;
- (8) affirms that the guarantee that both Houses will return to their historic Chambers as soon as possible should be incorporated in primary legislation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [HC Hansard, 31 January 2018, cols 878–9.](#)

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons, [Motions on Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster Explanatory Memorandum](#), 29 January 2018.

<sup>3</sup> [HC Hansard, 31 January 2018, cols 879–80.](#)

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, col 930.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, col 932.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, col 880.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, col 882.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, col 883.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, col 889.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, col 898.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, cols 907–8.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, cols 907–11.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, col 916.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, col 918.

<sup>16</sup> House of Commons Commission, '[Decisions—11 September 2017](#)', 29 September 2017; and [HC Hansard, 31 January 2018, col 924.](#)

<sup>17</sup> [HC Hansard, 31 January 2018, col 931.](#)

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, cols 933–5.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, cols 936–8.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, col 939.

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