



11 June 2019

Rt Hon Mel Stride, Leader of the House of Commons
Rt Hon Baroness Evans of Bowes Park, Leader of the House of Lords

Your ref: AL/NMPI300

Dear Leaders,

Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill

Thank you for your letter of 30 April to which you requested a response within six weeks.

We too welcomed the report of the Joint Committee on the Draft Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill, as well as the Government's response of 7 May, and agree that the shadow Sponsor Body is best placed to respond to each of the points you have raised in your letter, which we have set out in an Annex to this response.

As you suggest some of these responses are subject to developments, so we have provided updates where appropriate. We will endeavour to keep both the Government and both Houses informed as matters progress. The Joint Committee's report, alongside your letter, has already prompted us to make progress with some of these matters, which we agree are all important in ensuring the success of the programme.

On behalf of the shadow Sponsor Board, I would also like to place on record our gratitude for your efforts in facilitating progress on this bill – particularly Andrea Leadsom during her time as Leader of the Commons – including its introduction on 8 May and the recent completion of its Committee stage in the House of Commons, which is a welcome development. We will continue to work closely with the Government on the subsequent progress of the bill through both Houses.

I am copying this letter to the Speakers of both Houses, as the chairs of the House Commissions, and Dame Caroline Spelman MP, as the former chair of the Joint Committee on the Draft Bill.

A copy of this letter will also be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Yours sincerely

LIZ PEACE CBE

CHAIR, SHADOW SPONSOR BOARD

ANNEX: Conclusions by the Joint Committee to which the Leaders' requested a response from the shadow Sponsor Body

How the Sponsor Body will engage with the wider public, parliamentarians, staff and unions (paragraphs 17, 35-37 & 65 of the Joint Committee's report)

One of the shadow Sponsor Board's main strategic priorities is to "open up the Houses of Parliament, improve access and encourage a wider participation in the work of Parliament".

In the first six months of 2019, the Sponsor Body has delivered a range of engagement activities with Parliamentarians and their staff, including a questionnaire distributed to all Members and their staff. This was complemented by one-to-one interviews with a broad selection of Members and letters to all chairs of Parliamentary select and domestic committees, soliciting their views on a restored and renewed Palace of Westminster. We have also piloted 'Meet the Designer' discussions on the theme of accessibility and inclusion, enabling Member feedback on wide-ranging and productive discussions. Members have welcomed this approach and similar discussions are planned for other design themes. In late 2018/early 2019, the Sponsor Body distributed a questionnaire to all staff members, complemented by supplementary engagement with teams who have infrequent access to computers. We've also hosted workshops with staff on current ways of working and been in dialogue with the unions representing Members' staff (MAPSA, Unite and the NUJ), as well as with HR teams in both Houses who lead discussion with staff trade unions. The Sponsor Body will continue engaging with staff, with a view to appointing a central point of contact for all staff in due course, while respecting the roles of the Houses as employers. The shadow Sponsor Board has also recently considered a strategy for engaging members of both Houses on the restoration works; such a strategy will be required under clause 5 of the Bill.

Looking ahead, the shadow Sponsor Board will shortly consider a public engagement strategy. This is being developed in consultation with both Houses in order to deliver on the Bill's requirement for the programme to deliver improved facilities for education and visitors in the future.

These strategies will be living documents, updated throughout the life of the programme. Recognising the importance of engagement more generally, the shadow Sponsor Board has also established an engagement group chaired by a member of the Board to oversee this activity.

Ensuring the programme is sufficiently flexible to accommodate any future procedural reforms in both Houses (paragraph 18 of the Joint Committee's report)

We agree that the programme should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate any future procedural reforms in either House. Clearly, it is a matter for the Houses to determine any reforms to their procedures, but it will be important for the programme to facilitate rather than impede such developments. It is also important to note that any future procedural changes will not necessarily be contingent on the restoration work.

Recognising the importance of this matter, the shadow Sponsor Board agreed a goal to “Help facilitate any procedural changes that may be requested by either House” as part of its Functionality & Design strategic theme, which commits the programme to “Deliver a building which supports Parliament’s core function as a working legislature, both now and in the future using high-quality design and technology”. This strategic approach was also endorsed by the Commissions of both Houses in May 2019.

The importance of having political figureheads for the programme on the Sponsor Body (paragraph 103 of the Joint Committee’s report)

We noted the Joint Committee’s discussion of this matter and recognise it was an issue of concern to Members. We therefore welcomed the Joint Committee’s recommendation that parliamentarians on the Sponsor Board should speak on behalf of the programme in Parliament, including answering parliamentary questions, as well as the Government’s endorsement of this approach. We also note that these arrangements are only likely to apply once the Sponsor Board is a substantive body as the spokespeople for each House Commission fulfil this role on behalf of the programme at present.

We note that analogous arrangements already exist in both Houses, with the spokespeople for each Commission responding to oral and written questions on behalf of their respective House administrations, as well as occasionally making written statements. In the House of Commons, the Chair of the Public Accounts Commission and the Members designated to answer on behalf of the Speaker’s Committees on the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (SCIPSA) and Electoral Commission all answer written questions on behalf their respective statutory bodies. In every case but SCIPSA they also answer oral questions. The Second Church Estates Commissioner also maintains statutory accountability of the Church Commissioners to Parliament, through her membership of the Ecclesiastical Committee, as well as responding to parliamentary questions and steering Church of England legislation through that House.

We anticipate that the shadow Sponsor Board will be invited to consider and agree its preferred approach to the appointment of spokespeople in the autumn, ahead of its transition to the substantive stage. Apart from responding to parliamentary questions, and subject to procedural discussions within both Houses, the possibility of the spokespeople also making written statements and moving resolutions to agree the Outline Business Case (as required by the Bill) could also be explored.

Having a clear timetable which outlines the stages of the project, particularly with regard to when both Houses will be returning to the Palace of Westminster (paragraph 169 of the Joint Committee’s report)

That the outline business case prepared for Parliament makes clear what would constitute “significant changes” to the programme (paragraph 48 of the Joint Committee’s report)

We recognise the importance of defining a clear timetable for the programme, including the key milestones. At this early stage in the programme’s development it is not yet possible to define the precise timescales, but this will form part of the Outline Business Case (OBC) which will be brought before both Houses in due course. The timetable will be dependent, in part, on the completion of the Northern Estate Programme, which is currently a separate Parliamentary programme but also a critical enabler of the R&R programme, with the decant of the Palace of Westminster due to commence in the mid-2020s.

We absolutely recognise the strong message delivered by Parliament during the debates in early 2018 that it will be imperative for the two Houses to return to their historic chambers, as soon as possible following the work, and welcome the fact that this is reflected in the Bill. Once the schedule becomes clearer, one of our key strategic priorities is to maintain a relentless focus on delivering the programme on time and budget, including presenting the OBC to both Houses, and ensuring it is 'handed back' on schedule.

We are also happy to confirm that the OBC will make it clear what would constitute a "significant change" to the programme, for which Parliamentary approval will be required.