

The New Assembly Building

The Presiding Officer: I have selected amendments 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 in the name of William Graham, amendment 2 in the name of Michael German and amendment 3 in the name of Jocelyn Davies.

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): I propose that

the National Assembly, further to its resolution of 21 June 2000, resolves: to seek competitive tenders for the completion of the Assembly building based on the design prepared by the Richard Rogers Partnership and either lease it to the Assembly or sell it for an agreed lump sum; and, pending acceptance of such a tender, to suspend works on the building. (NNDM773)

I regret having to report to the Assembly today that, despite previous assurance by the Richard Rogers Partnership and the findings of the Turner and Townsend review of estimates in the spring and last summer, it will not be possible to deliver the new Assembly building within the approved construction budget of £13.8 million and, therefore, within the overall projected budget of £26.6 million. When I reported on progress to the Assembly in January, I noted that, despite the fact that the project remained on budget, some cost pressures were emerging and that there could be some small call on contingencies. In light of that, I signalled my intention to commission a thorough review of costs.

The review involved the Assembly's external independent quantity surveyors, the Symmonds Group, the Richard Rogers Partnership and its surveyors, Hanscomb, the management contractor, Skanska, and our in-house quantity surveyor. The review has been time-consuming and very thorough. It highlighted significant underestimates in the cost plan prepared by the Richard Rogers Partnership. The main conclusion was a forecast out-turn construction cost of £24 million, with substantial risks of further costs. That meant a project out-turn cost in excess of £40 million. When it became apparent, during the review, that the costs were higher than anticipated, a cost reduction exercise, undertaken by the Richard Rogers Partnership, was instigated by my officials. This brought about design changes that led to some cost savings, but not to the extent that would bring the scheme back within budget. The figures presented today reflect those design changes. The Assembly will want to note that they include a reduction in the building's footprint, which has not compromised the basic design, its visual impact or the facilities that will be available to members of the public.

It is clear that the scheme design that we were invited to sign off in November could not have been constructed for anywhere near the estimates we were provided with at that time. The estimating process is a matter for the scheme's cost consultant and forms part of the Richard Rogers Partnership design team's commission. I am confident that the administration's policy steering group or the Assembly's project team could not have done any more than they have to predict and control costs. In recognition of my stated desire to keep tight control of costs, the Assembly has, throughout the process, been advised on costs by our independent quantity surveyors, appointed in January 2001.

Cost increases of this magnitude require us to question whether it is right to proceed or not, and, if it is right, whether to continue with the current procurement method and the present architectural team. The policy steering group and I remain of the view that the Assembly still needs a new chamber and that it should be built on the current site and to the Richard Rogers Partnership design. This was the Assembly's resolution in June 2000, and it is still possible to deliver a building in accordance with the Assembly's wishes. Unfortunately, we have also come to the view that we cannot be confident in the current arrangements that the building could be delivered within a cost that the Assembly would consider to be reasonably close to its expectations.

Members will be aware that a letter I received from Lord Rogers has been placed in the public domain. This is unfortunate, as I would not normally wish to comment on correspondence between the Assembly and one of its contractors. However, as it is in the public domain and raises serious issues, I feel that I must comment. I am satisfied that Lord Rogers and his team had every opportunity to present the cost plan and their views on the current situation to me personally, as the investment decision-maker, and to the policy steering group. I am also satisfied that the majority of the cost increase identified as a result of the cost review is not due to client changes or enhancements. In total, we estimate that, even with the most generous interpretation, only about £1.2 million of the increase is due to the client. Finally, I have no doubt, on the basis of external independent professional advice received from the Symmonds Group during the cost review, that most of the cost increase is due to the underestimation of the scope, content and work contained in the Richard Rogers Partnership's original cost plan.

As you have heard, the Richard Rogers Partnership has said that my representatives—and I understand that to mean my officials and their professional advisers—have attempted to disguise costs. Officials have kept me fully informed on costs throughout the project. Neither the policy steering group nor I have been misled at any stage and I have every confidence in the advice that I have received. Lord Rogers was asked to substantiate that statement, but was unable to provide any evidence. The discussions with Lord Rogers have not been able to reconcile our views on the reason for the cost increases or to convince me that we will be able to work together to deliver the building within an agreed budget.

Colleagues from the policy steering group share that view and we came to an unanimous conclusion that we should terminate the employment of the Richard Rogers Partnership. Termination takes effect as from today. The Assembly's resolution that a Chamber should be built to RRP's design is not affected. The policy steering group remains of the view that there is a need for the Chamber building, that it should be on the existing site and that the RRP design should be progressed through to completion. The Assembly is entitled to use the design documents to complete the building.

The motion before you offers us a means of achieving that. We are of the view that, by going to the market and seeking the services of a developer to finish the design

and construct the building, the Assembly will be able to achieve its desired outcome. It will be able to do so in a way that leads to cost reduction, an increased degree of cost certainty prior to the contract being signed and risk transfer from the public to the private sector.

In essence, the course of action that we propose will be to proceed with the RRP design in a way that keeps costs to a minimum and gives us as much cost certainty as possible. I believe that this will best be achieved by appointing a developer to complete the design and construct the building, either for an agreed lump sum or on the basis of a lease agreement. That would mean suspending the work currently taking place on site and following the European Union procurement rules to secure a new developer to take the design forward. This is bound to cause delay to the current programme and it is evident that the building will not be completed before the next election. It is important to note that the motion only commits the Assembly to go to the market to establish the cost of pursuing the developer option. Final decisions on whether developer options offer value for money and whether we should proceed will not be taken until then.

In commending the motion to the Assembly, I reiterate that I very much regret that it has not been possible to proceed with the scheme as originally proposed. However, it is the Assembly's duty to act professionally and responsibly, to be vigilant on behalf of the people of Wales and to do everything possible to reduce costs and obtain value for money. Given that we no longer have confidence in the present contractual arrangements, we believe that it is better to take remedial steps now than to face an uncertain and potentially costly future. I believe that the course of action set out in the motion offers the best way forward to ensure that the people of Wales and the Assembly have the landmark building that we all envisaged, but in the most cost-effective way.

The Presiding Officer: If it appears that we will continue after 5.30 p.m., I will ask the Minister for Assembly Business to propose a further procedural motion, to allow us to continue after that time and I will call a vote on that.

Nick Bourne: I propose the following amendments in the name of William Graham.
Amendment 1: delete everything after '*to*' and insert '*cancel the new Assembly building project*'.

I propose amendment 4. Add as a new point at the end of the motion:
to publish immediately the full costs expended and or committed to the new Assembly building to date.

I propose amendment 5. Add as a new point at the end of the motion:
to publish immediately the reasons for ending the contract with the Richard Rogers Partnership and the costs associated with that decision.

I propose amendment 6. Add as a new point at the end of the motion:
to publish immediately the costs of discontinuing with the new Assembly building project.

I propose amendment 7. Add as a new point at the end of the motion:

to deplore the failure to set out the facts of the circumstances surrounding the cancellation of the contract at an early date.

I propose amendment 8. Add as a new point at the end of the motion:

to postpone the decision on the new Assembly building until all the facts and figures are established regarding the project costs expended or committed to date and the costs of cancelling the contract with the Richard Rogers Partnership are published, if necessary recalling the full Assembly in the summer recess.

Presiding Officer, I thank you for your flexibility in indicating that this debate can continue beyond 5.30 p.m. I hope that that sets a sensible precedent if nothing else sensible comes out of reopening this issue yet again. I deplore the fact that this is being sprung on us at this late stage. If you had not shown such flexibility, we would have had insufficient time to debate this issue. I cannot understand why it is necessary. We have not been given all the facts and figures. They should be given to all Assembly Members and should be available to the general public, to enable them to see what is being done in their name. I cannot understand why that is not the case. It could well be that, at this stage, cancellation is the most sensible option. We have not been informed of the cost of cancellation. However, I have seen an authoritative document, upon which the Minister might like to comment, that indicates that the cost of cancellation would be £10 million at this stage. That document also indicates that the total cost of proceeding will be no less than £47 million. The same document indicates that there is no faith in the project being delivered within £47 million nor in items such as the roof being included in that cost. Last time I looked at the weather, a roof seemed to be essential. If that increases the cost further, the original estimate of £50 million that we discussed, for which we were accused of scaremongering, appears to be closer to the truth. Fifty million pounds now seems to be the cost of this building, which, by any token, is a massive amount.

5:00 p.m.

There has been talk of it being a symbol of the new Wales, but this morning I looked out of the windows on the other side of this building at the black hole that represents the new Assembly building. I must say that it looked rather symbolic of the disaster—and I am glad that the First Minister has returned to the Chamber—facing this administration. To be fair to Rhodri Morgan, he sought to review the decision on the new building at an early stage. I do not think that he is in favour of its construction. He did not favour this option when we last voted on it. At this eleventh hour, would it not be sensible to cancel the project and concentrate on issues that matter to the people of Wales such as health, education and rural services? We do not have all the figures, so we cannot be certain, but I have seen documents that indicate that cancellation is the sensible option. If the facts and figures that I have seen are correct, continuing with the project would be expensive.

I encourage Edwina Hart—who has previously had a reputation for openness, which has taken a bit of a dent over this—to publish the figures so that we can all see them. If we are going to make a decision on this, those figures should be available to us and

they should not be trotted out quickly at the beginning of a debate when we do not have a copy of the statement in front of us. That is not how this Assembly should operate. Therefore, I encourage the Minister to publish the figures. If necessary, we should be recalled during the summer recess to consider this matter, if the facts and figures become available.

I take no real pleasure in saying that this was a disaster waiting to happen and that we predicted it. This issue is more serious than party politics. It affects the institution of the Assembly and the perception of Wales. As I said, the black hole next to the Assembly building serves as a symbol. I hope that that is not how people will remember the first term of the National Assembly for Wales, but nothing that I have heard this afternoon convinces me otherwise. Money, time and effort have been wasted. This issue keeps coming back to us. Should we not be cancelling this project now or, at least, see all the facts and figures so that we can make a sensible decision rather than send further good money after bad?

Michael German: Michael German: I propose amendment 2 in my name. Add as a new point:

to instruct the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities to bring forward, following receipt and consideration of tenders, a recommendation as to whether the project should proceed and, if so, on what basis.

I take a different view on this than the Conservatives, as do the Welsh Liberal Democrats. We voted for this building in June last year, and we voted, as was recommended, for certainty. Pausing the project today is an example of prudent management. We are pausing, not cancelling or abandoning, this process to achieve greater certainty and greater clarity on the figures. That is a wise choice because many of us feel let down by the process that has led to this cost over-run. We feel that we have not been given the significant figures on which we could have worked, or the level of certainty that we desired. This decision has been made today to provide us with a greater level of certainty.

It is not an irreversible step. We are making a decision now on whether we want to take the time to test the market to see whether it can provide us with that higher level of certainty, which will then lead us to make a final decision. The Assembly is deciding on the ability to stop, change or substantially alter this project, in terms of its financial profile. Our colleagues in London and Edinburgh would have loved to have had the opportunity to do that. I remind Nick of his Government's fated project, Portcullis House, which was built despite a huge cost over-run. Unlike us today, it could not have made the decision to pause, refer, stop, change and alter. The Scottish Parliament has encountered the same over-run with its building. We are fortunate, in that we have the appropriate checks and balances in the system, to enable us to pursue the proper financial profile, and to be able to reflect and change direction. My amendment 2, and Plaid Cymru's similar amendment 3, reinforces that position. That is why we are being prudent.

It is essential for people to know that using indigenous materials is still an important issue. You heard from the Minister that these were not major factors in the cost over-

run. We know that the figures presented to us on indigenous materials represent a small element of the over-run. However, we should not lay aside our commitment to use, where possible, indigenous materials from Wales, such as wood and slate. That would be an important symbol if we proceed. Similarly, we should not lay aside our commitment to using renewable energy and energy-efficient systems in the building. These do not significantly alter the cost differences that we now face.

It would be imprudent for this Assembly to continue as before. That is why I support this amendment and motion. It will give us an opportunity, as an Assembly, to take forward a development for which we have voted on many occasions. It will allow us to put in place the checks and balances so obviously missing from other buildings of this sort. Those checks and balances put us in a better position than ever before. I therefore feel that this is the right approach. We are not taking a negative approach. We are pausing, reflecting and taking the view forward that we still want to see this building built, and built within an appropriate financial envelope, which is what this motion says.

Cynog Dafis: I propose amendment 3 in the name of Jocelyn Davies. Add as new point:

to instruct the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities to bring forward, following the receipt and consideration of tenders, a recommendation as to whether the project should proceed and if so on what basis.

Plaid Cymru supports the motion. We have tabled an amendment, which was adopted, after we drafted it, by the Liberal Democrats. There is a grammatical problem with the wording of the motion. I am sure that that can be adjusted.

Edwina Hart's statement causes ennui among us all. It doubtless causes some rejoicing among the Welsh Conservatives, but ennui for the majority of us. It also causes much anger. It is unsatisfactory that we are faced with this possible increase in the cost of the building at this stage.

This kind of increase in cost often occurs, as Mike German said. It happened with the Scottish Parliament and Portculis House. However, we should not use that as an excuse. The fact that it occurred in those cases should have made us more vigilant in this matter. We should have foreseen the kinds of things that happen with prestigious buildings. Public buildings sometimes give developers an opportunity to make a profit, because of their high status.

It is obvious to me, nevertheless—and it is important to put on record—that the main fault in this matter, without any doubt, lies with the Richard Rogers Partnership, as we decided to proceed with the project on the basis of its figures. We were confident that the figures were valid.

I remember attending a presentation by the Richard Rogers Partnership and Richard Rogers himself was present. I remember asking him specifically what guarantee could be given that the building could be built within the estimated cost. Richard Rogers

said in that meeting that he was confident it could be done and he referred to his company's past record in constructing public buildings, which confirmed that.

We need to—and I endorse what has already been said—reject the suggestion that it is the Assembly's additional requirements that have caused this increase, such as using Welsh materials and disabled access. Such matters are peripheral in terms of the increase to which we refer.

Therefore, the fault lies with Rogers. People used the word 'deception' in this context. That is an appropriate word. It is a strong word.

5:10 p.m.

The Presiding Officer: Order. I would ask you to reconsider the word 'deception'. It could be viewed as insulting to a person who is not a Member of this Assembly.

Cynog Dafis: I am willing to reconsider my use of that word.

However, we must discover why the project manager and project team could not have foreseen these problems and made provision for them. The fact that we have an innovative building and prestigious project should have been built into the cost projections in the first place.

Having said that, it is a good thing that we now have the opportunity to step in—and that is what is happening today—before this project becomes totally out of control as occurred in the case of the Scottish Parliament and Portcullis House. Therefore, Plaid Cymru—The Party of Wales supports the motion. The work should be suspended and the contract with the Richard Rogers Partnership should be terminated. We agree that we should go out to competitive tender to find a developer to continue with the scheme and that we should have the option of buying or leasing the building for a period before it becomes the Assembly's property in due course.

The next step would be an agreement on cost. The risk of any increase in cost would then be off-loaded onto the developer. That is the only responsible way forward. That would mean that the developer would have an incentive to control the cost, which is not the case at the moment. It is a shame that we did not opt for this choice in the first place. I would like a response as to why we did not pursue that in the first place. However, we must still ensure that provision for the disabled is secured. We must secure that above all. We must also ensure that the quality of the building is not forfeited. We must ensure that the building is still an example of sustainable development, built with indigenous materials. In my opinion, that is the bottom-line for the whole project.

The Plaid Cymru—Party of Wales group has always supported the principle of having a new debating chamber for the National Assembly. That is still important. However, we did not support a building that would cost £40 million and more. Our amendment is clear enough. It is the Minister's responsibility to administer the project. It is her

responsibility to recommend to the Assembly whether or not to proceed with the project.

I would like to hear what the Minister has to say on the Welsh Conservatives' amendments. As far as we are concerned, it is important that every piece of information is made public. It is not acceptable to hide information. There are times when that is appropriate, but, sooner or later the truth must be revealed. We must take any decisions on the basis of that truth.

Therefore, we must accept that, unless it is possible to carry out the work at an affordable price, there is a possibility that we cannot proceed with this scheme. It is an open matter. We must issue a clear message to that end.

This is the Plaid Cymru—Party of Wales standpoint. We would like for the Assembly to have a fitting home. It is important that that happens. This building is not a fitting home. It is totally unsuitable. The Welsh Conservatives know that, despite what they say publicly. However, if we cannot secure that fitting home at a credible price, we will possibly have to live without one at the end of the day.

Ron Davies: I was disappointed to hear Edwina's statement and I know that she and colleagues from other political parties will have had a difficult time considering this matter. From reading the report and listening to Edwina's statement, it is obvious that the heart of the issue that we face is the difference of opinion between the Richard Rogers Partnership and Edwina's specialist advisers. I believe that that places most of us in a difficult position. We are asked to accept the difference of opinion, but we have not seen the evidence of the case that would, presumably, be argued on the part of the Richard Rogers Partnership. Yet, as an Assembly, we are being asked to endorse the decision that has been put to us.

I accept that we must make a decision and I am prepared to support Edwina's recommendation. I know that Edwina is mindful to reject the amendment in the name of William Graham. However, I ask her to accept the fact that the Assembly has been placed in a difficult position. It has been asked to endorse this decision blindly. I understand that there are issues of commercial confidentiality, but I ask Edwina to acknowledge that even if she cannot accept these amendments today—which I appreciate—that she will undertake that all relevant information, save that which must be protected by commercial confidentiality, will be placed in the public domain at the earliest opportunity.

Our problem seems to be that we have the Richard Rogers Partnership on the one hand and the professional advisers on the other. The Richard Rogers Partnership is hardly your back-street dealer. It has an international reputation. It has won an international competition. An independent panel adjudged its design, which inspired many people's imaginations. On the other hand, we have the professional advisers. They come and go, some are in-house and some are out-of-house. It must be said that they have not been spectacularly successful over the last few years. I can recall my sense of confidence and elation about 12 months ago, when I was told that we had the Turner and Townsend report. The whole project had been crawled over. We had

had a risk assessment, which had meant a three-month delay for the project. It was only costing £300,000 but nevertheless we were assured that we had it right, that we knew all eventualities and that we could proceed with confidence with the contract. Somebody got it wrong. It was a risk assessment, but it did not foresee the particular risk that now faces us.

The difficulty with a project of this nature is that the architect's design is only 50 per cent complete. There is an inevitable dynamic element to it. The project must grow. When that happens, unexpected eventualities will always occur. It seems to me that the Assembly's current problem is that it has been obsessed with costs. It has not given due consideration to value for money, and what the Assembly building should be.

I hope that we will not cause a self-inflicted wound this afternoon. An architect with an international reputation has prepared this design. However, we are now told that the footprint, the roof, and the internal architecture must all be changed. I hope that we will not embark on a project where unnamed contractors—I hope that you can find them, Edwina, but I do not know who they will be—will dispense with certain pieces of the design. What will be the end result? It will not be the prestigious building to which we have committed ourselves, as designed by the Richard Rogers Partnership. We will end up with something that is perhaps fit for purpose, but will certainly not meet our wider aspirations.

I conclude by saying that we have no option but to accept the recommendations put to us by Edwina with a heavy heart. I hope that we will not sacrifice principles of value for money for ideas of cost or price, or forget the wider issue of providing—let's say it—a building of architectural renown that is recognised across the world.

I hope, Edwina, that your recommendation will be accepted. However, I also hope that we will not have to revisit this issue yet again in six or nine months' time because the professional advisers got it wrong.

Dafydd Wigley: Cynog referred to the anger that he felt about this situation that we face today. I must confess that I am livid about it. I believe that we have been misled—without blaming anyone, as we are not yet in a position to know who misled whom. There is no doubt that we followed this path expecting this project to be completed at a much lower cost than is now likely to happen.

5:20 p.m.

As Ron said, if errors have been made in the process to date, how do we know that that will not happen in future? How can we have certainty in the figures on which we are working? I willingly admit that I supported the option to locate the Assembly at City Hall, as my friends in the Plaid Cymru group know. I accepted the decision to locate it here for several reasons, including the fact that it appeared that locating the Assembly at City Hall would be much more expensive than constructing a new building here. However, these figures make that situation and analysis look laughable. On what basis are we, as a body, led to make decisions? Did we receive adequate advice?

Although I do not know where exactly the fault lies, I know that someone along the line is to blame.

I have examined the figures on the cost increases of the project. There have even been increases since last November. The cost of the roof carcassing has increased from £560,000 to £1.6 million. That is an increase of 200 per cent. The glazing costs have increased from £1.2 million to £1.7 million in seven or eight months. The cost of the timber cladding has increased from £200,000 to £1.2 million, and the cost of the metalwork has increased from £240,000 to £547,000. These increases, which add up to the costs that we are debating today, must have been assessable at the time. What level of incompetence has led us to the position today where we must face the embarrassment of the building costing £40 million, or possibly even £50 million? How can we square that cost with our own electors when it must be balanced against other expenditures?

All Members know that this debating chamber is inadequate. We cannot see each other, the roof is too low and there are pillars. We need a building that is worthy. However, we must ask what procedures are used by the Assembly to assess, calculate and reach decisions on major capital expenditure projects such as this. If the procedures can go wrong in relation to our own debating chamber, why should they not go wrong with a host of other projects, be they hospitals, schools or other buildings, throughout Wales? We must be sure in our own minds and hearts, as elected representatives charged with guarding public money, that we are receiving proper analysis, proper information and that we make decisions on a proper basis. I support the motion but let there be no doubt that, when we return to this— [Conservative Assembly Members: 'Oh.'].

Alun Cairns *rose—*

Dafydd Wigley: I support the motion, as it gives us an opportunity to consider alternative figures and to obtain all the information that we require in order to make a decision. One alternative decision, Alun, is not to go ahead with the project. However, we can only decide whether or not to proceed when we have the facts in full. I support the motion—although I hope that it will be amended—so that we can make that decision.

The message must go out from the Assembly to all those who are considering tendering for the contract that we are not a soft touch. We will not be taken for a ride on this or any another project. The line has been drawn in the sand, and we stand with that line.

Alison Halford: It is difficult to follow that comment. I agree with everything that Dafydd Wigley said. If anyone wants to know what went wrong, I commend the Auditor General's report, 'Accommodation Arrangements for the National Assembly for Wales'. It makes sad bedtime reading. The information is all contained in the report. Dafydd is right to say that we have been let down. Edwina Hart has been given the poisoned chalice.

Let us take a look at what has happened. In March 1998, it was decided that an architectural competition should be held to find a design for the building. Six designs were entered in the competition and a plot of land was set aside. Five of the six designs did not fit within the scope of the plot of land. Yet, the officials pressed on. The name of the architect who won the competition was announced. However, the project was not costed properly. No contract was signed. Two years into the project, a contract had not even been signed with the architect. What else went wrong? The Richard Rogers Partnership was allowed to use its own quantity surveyor. Its fees increased with the cost of the building, which increased by 73 per cent. Are we not entitled to ask who is responsible for drawing up these contracts and who has allowed us to reach this situation? It is not frontbench Assembly Members. It is not me, although I have to go back to north Wales to explain the ever-escalating cost to my constituents. It is the officials that we employ. I give the officials their due; they considered risk assessment—

Alun Cairns: Do you not accept that officials are not elected representatives, who must accept the ultimate responsibility? It is not good enough to blame officials. Ministers must be held to account.

Alison Halford: That is unfair. I have to go back to north Wales to respond to people who ask why they have to pay this money. We pay officials and we pay experts. In fairness, the experts have also let us down badly. We have been let down by the procurement process, which has been flawed—

Cynog Dafis: Will Alison accept that it is not just the people of north Wales who have concerns? This is a matter of concern for people across Wales equally.

Alison Halford: I accept that. I know that it is not good form to blame anyone. However, Dafydd is right. We must have an Assembly building. Let us hope that we can build it at no greater cost. Let us try to learn from the enormous mistakes that have been made. My God, if you read the Auditor General's report, you will see the number of mistakes that have been made. I agree with Dafydd that we have been let down badly. It is dreadful that so many things have gone wrong. The Assembly worked hard to prevent what has just happened. I agree that Edwina should consider this. We should all consider it because, as Dafydd said, this is happening over and over again. We must find a way of costing an expensive building in Wales and sticking to those costs.

Procedural Motion

The Presiding Officer: I draw Members' attention to the fact that, as this business was not programmed to continue after 5.30 p.m., we will be in contravention of Standing Orders if we continue without holding a vote. I therefore invite the Minister for Assembly Business to propose a procedural motion to extend today's session.

The Minister for Assembly Business (Andrew Davies): I propose that *the National Assembly, under Standing Order No. 6.16, allows the debate on the*

new Assembly building to continue after 5.30 p.m.

Motion: For 46, Abstain 0, Against 2.

The following Members voted for:

Barrett, Lorraine
Bates, Mick
Black, Peter
Bourne, Nick
Burnham, Eleanor
Cairns, Alun
Davies, Andrew
Davies, David
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Janet
Davies, Jocelyn
Davies, Ron
Edwards, Richard
Evans, Delyth
German, Michael
Gibbons, Brian
Graham, William
Gregory, Janice
Griffiths, John
Gwyther, Christine
Hart, Edwina
Hutt, Jane
Jarman, Pauline
Jones, Ann
Jones, Elin
Jones, Gareth
Jones, Ieuan Wyn
Law, Peter
Lewis, Huw
Lloyd, David
Melding, David
Middlehurst, Tom
Morgan, Jonathan
Morgan, Rhodri
Neagle, Lynne
Randerson, Jenny
Richards, Rod
Rogers, Peter
Ryder, Janet
Sinclair, Karen
Thomas, Owen John
Thomas, Rhodri Glyn
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Kirsty
Williams, Phil

The following Members voted against:

Halford, Alison
Pugh, Alun

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Motion carried.

The New Assembly Building: Continued

William Graham: As Alison fondly imagined, this is a poisoned chalice. It is no comfort to the Welsh Conservatives that our warnings over the last two years have been vindicated. That is no satisfaction. [Assembly Members: 'Oh.'] It is a serious

point. We must ensure that there is no further squandering of taxpayers' money. We know that the cost of the building may well exceed £50 million. I remind Members that the architect originally suggested that the building would not cost more than £13 million. We have been misled time and time again. We must only consider the precedent of the Scottish Parliament. The cost of that building is £250 million and it is still rising. Will the Minister tell us where the breakdown occurred? What are the reasons for ditching the Richard Rogers Partnership? It cannot be for procurement reasons, as they were given in the original design brief. It was always known that Welsh materials should be used. There was serious underestimation. There are concerns about the glass wall technology. It is, after all, technically unproven, and there are few examples of it. Concerns have already been raised about the roof structure. That is a matter of concern. Will the Minister tell us what is the cost of termination? Was this a design and built contract? To say that we are opting for some form of private finance initiative is no solution. Insufficient financial figures have been given. Will the Minister publish the correct figures as soon as possible? In terms of the cost of curtailing the project, only the beginning of the foundations—the piling alone—has been laid. That can easily be used if the site is sold to another project.

5:30 p.m.

Entering into a fixed-price contract will be remarkably impossible. However, I ask the Minister to comment on that. We ask you to consider our amendments with the greatest possible concern and to support them.

Lorraine Barrett: It is difficult to know what to say. This is disappointing but I remain committed to the project and to the notion of a new debating Chamber—hopefully, this debating Chamber.

To stop this going ahead, as the Conservatives would have us do, would be a huge backward step for Wales. It would be worse than failing to build Zaha Hadid's opera house. What is Wales's problem? Do we not have vision? Are we forever to be seen as an unadventurous and visionless country by those who respect quality and creativity? That is what the new building is supposed to be about. There were many Japanese journalists here today. I am sure that they were not impressed with our current building. We have an excuse for a Government building, while we talk about the new, confident Wales and say that we are looking to find our place in the world and use other such clichés about Wales.

Turning to the Conservatives, we could always find other things on which to spend the money. That is the case with every decision that we take. It is easy for the hypocrites on the other side of the Chamber to say 'stop this building'.

Nick Bourne *rose*—

Lorraine Barrett: I will not give way.

When the new Chamber, Committee rooms and public spaces are completed, they will enjoy the improved facilities—

The Presiding Officer: Order. I heard you use the word 'hypocrite'. I ask you to reconsider that.

Lorraine Barrett: I will reconsider it.

The Presiding Officer: Will you rephrase—

Lorraine Barrett: No. I am sorry, Llywydd, but several of them have told me privately that they look forward to the new building and that they will enjoy it when it is built.

The Presiding Officer: Order. I do not consider the use of the word 'hypocrite' to be in line with our Protocol on Conduct in the Chamber.

Lorraine Barrett: For you, I will take it back for now.

The Presiding Officer: I ask you to rephrase your remarks.

Lorraine Barrett: I will refer to them as the disingenuous Tories.

The Presiding Officer: Order. It is also inappropriate to describe the Welsh Conservative group as Tories. We have been down this road before.

Lorraine Barrett: Very well. The Conservatives on the other side will enjoy the new building when it is built, as they have told me privately. I will not break confidences by mentioning names.

We welcome visitors from all over the world, whether Bangor, Barry, Bahrain or Bermuda. This building and its Chamber is not good enough for Wales or any other country.

Nick Bourne *rose*—

The Presiding Officer: Order. Are you giving way to the leader of the Welsh Conservatives?

Lorraine Barrett: No, I am not. I want to finish this.

It is a depressing day but we must not crumble. We must achieve a building worthy of the name of the Government of Wales. If having a worthy parliamentary building is good enough for Scotland and for the UK, it is good enough for us. It is probably too late, but has the Minister considered bringing in the likes of the Royal Institute of British Architects to mediate in discussions. I feel sad that Richard Rogers's name will not be attached to this building. If Bilbao can do it, why cannot we?

I accept the motion with a heavy heart, as Ron said. We have a responsibility to protect the public purse, but we also have a responsibility not to make Wales look

like some backwater hick town.

Glyn Davies: What a shambles this is. What an embarrassing, first-rank, 'cawl' of a shambles we face today. Over the last two years, I have stood in this Chamber on many occasions and I have asked, begged and sometimes even bullied, to try to persuade Members not to go ahead with this project. I have warned about the costs, and have said that they were hopelessly understated. I have also said that it was a huge mistake for us to even think about making an investment of this sort until we had some scores on the board and the Welsh people truly had an affection for this place and it was something that we could do with some degree of support. Sometimes, I spoke unreasonably. Sometimes, I spoke with anger. I remember on one occasion that I spoke with such ferocity about the First Minister's leadership qualities that he was half way to the rostrum to sort me out. I think that we all remember that occasion.

On this occasion, my main concern is that the people of Wales and Assembly Members have not been told the truth. I well remember discussing this plan with a builder who knew exactly what the cost of this sort of project was. I showed him the model. He told me it would cost a good £30 million if the bleeping thing can be built.

The cost then was £22.8 million; it is now over £40 million, perhaps £50 million. The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities can give us no guarantee that the costs will not rise further. There is doubt about the buildability of the building—about the roof. I have never heard of a building that was half built until we knew we could put a roof on it, except perhaps for an open-air swimming pool. It is absolutely outrageous.

Blaming Lord Rogers is fair, but we should not only blame him. The Government and the First Minister must share some of the blame. I have referred to lack of leadership before. Even now, I do not know what the First Minister's view is—perhaps he will tell us during this debate. We do not know whether he is in favour of a new building, whether he is in favour of an extension, about which I was rude, or in favour of not going ahead at all. He does not want to tell us. Perhaps he will stand up and tell us today. One option that we face is abandoning the building, as we want. It seems that the cost of that will perhaps be £10 million. We will have to consider that. I have heard other Members speak. I have heard Cynog Dafis and Dafydd Wigley recognise that this may be the truth. I heard Mike German speak, but I was not quite sure what he was talking about regarding the Liberal Democrat view. There was something about checks and balances. I thought to myself, all we really need are big cheques and empty balances. That seems to be the only sensible thing that he said.

One point that I wish to make is that I do not feel any anger as I speak today. I feel a genuine sense of sadness because of what this will do—not only during this debate, but throughout the summer—to the reputation, not just of the Assembly, but of Wales. When you have something as shambolic as this, which, I imagine, will be reported across Britain, it will reflect on us all, no matter how hard we argued

against this project. Let us blame Lord Rogers—that is justified, and that argument has been made. However, we must also point the finger at the First Minister. He has not given leadership on this most important project. I am certain that he will sit there today and not make his views known. That is an unacceptable way to go forward.

We should abandon the project today. It is doomed, as Fraser used to say in *Dad's Army*. It is a completely doomed project. However, let us assume that other Members will not support that view. We must spend the summer considering these costs. If they are exactly as we suspect they are today, I believe that a majority of Assembly Members will have to come around to agree with the Conservatives that we speak for the people of Wales when we call for this project to be abandoned.

Peter Law: This is, sadly, a poor example to those we oversee outside, without a shadow of a doubt. We are in a difficult situation. That is what comes with openness and accountability when things go wrong. It can be uncomfortable, but it is honest. It is fair to say that we do not look professional having got to this situation. However, the Minister has acted in the best propriety and has explained the difficulties to the Assembly today. It is a problem. As Members know, I did not vote in favour of this design as I felt, at the time, that it was not appropriate. I voted in favour of what was known as the car park option, which would have cost approximately £10 million less than the current design, but would probably be in the region of £25 million less by now. That is how it was at the time. I did not think that the design was appropriate. Some Members felt that it looked like a petrol filling station and there was also a question mark about its weather-proofing. The Audit Committee considered the design and, thankfully, said that an independent quantity surveyor should be brought in. I am glad that that happened, because it probably played a part in bringing about the current situation.

5:40 p.m.

Having said that, we are where we are. Democracy spoke last June. I am a democrat, and recognise that I was in a minority at that time. Three of the Assembly's political parties have taken a reasoned and appropriate approach to this situation. The building's foundations are partly in place, but perhaps work will not proceed. On the other hand, we are now in a void, with a void. Therefore, we must reassess the situation carefully. That is the common sense approach. We cannot merely cancel the project.

The Conservative Party's bunch of political opportunists followed me last June and voted against the building. They now have the audacity to propose a number of amendments opposed to the project's continuation. That is an affront to democracy, as there was an overwhelming mandate for the building, even though I did not give my support. This reflects the Conservatives' usual divisive and destructive approach. This is the party that did not believe in the Assembly—

Nick Bourne: Will Peter Law explain what is undemocratic about proposing amendments in the hope that people will support them? If they are not supported,

we will act accordingly. I do not see anything undemocratic in that.

Peter Law: The Conservative Party has never wanted to do anything but cause destruction and as much division as possible. You have a short memory when it comes to the fact that it was your Government that poured £220 million into creating the lake, and everything that comes with it, in Cardiff Bay. As prudent people, you should not forget that. Other Members have other things to say. The pure hypocrisy—

David Davies *rose*—

The Presiding Officer: Order. This debate is about the proposed Assembly chamber. It is not about the history of Cardiff Bay. Will you give way to David Davies?

Peter Law: I thought that he had been ruled out of order. This reflects the Conservative group's hypocrisy because, on Thursday, they will support investing a further £25 million in the Wales Millennium Centre, the total cost of which will amount to over £100 million. That is the hypocrisy that I am talking about. I am a realist—

The Presiding Officer: Order. I have drawn attention to the fact that, according to the Protocol on Conduct in the Chamber, allegations of hypocrisy, untruthfulness or false utterances are not in order. I would ask Members not to use such expressions.

Peter Law: It appears to be hypocrisy, which will be confirmed on Thursday.

The Presiding Officer: Order. I cannot allow this rephrasing of discourteous language. It is not appropriate.

Peter Law: I withdraw my comments about hypocrisy and merely repeat that they are a bunch of political opportunists.

Nick Bourne: For your information, we have a free vote on this unlike perhaps your party. More to the point, I would be interested to hear—I tried to put the same point to Lorraine Barrett—what amount do you consider to be acceptable for a new Assembly building; if not £50 million, why not £100 million? I am concerned about this waste of money for Welsh taxpayers. That is not hypocritical. I have made the point time and again and have still not received a satisfactory answer. Perhaps you, rather than a Minister, may be able to provide that answer. What figure would be acceptable; if not £50 million, why not £100 million?

Peter Law: I am taking the common sense approach by pausing and considering and reassessing the situation, before the Assembly comes back with a report. Every reasonable Member will support that approach, with the exception of you and your group. The fact is that you have never been in favour of the Assembly, the new building design, the car park option or anything else. The only common sense approach would be to progress as outlined in the motion. We must not adopt a blank cheque mentality—and I do not think that anyone has done so—as a prudent approach is vital. We must wait for the Minister to come back on this before we

decide on what action to take, which should be reasonable and appropriate.

David Davies: I am delighted to follow that amazing speech by Peter Law. We first opposed this building when there was a price tag of £13 million. We said that we wanted the money to be spent on a children's hospital and were accused of being political opportunists. Since then, the cost has continued to rise. Each time, our line on this has been consistent. We have asked for the project to be halted and for the money to be spent on something that would be of benefit to the people of Wales. That is not being hypocritical, but entirely consistent.

Peter Law: Why then do you support the development of the Millennium Centre and the pumping of more public funds into that?

David Davies: You seem to think that I do, no-one else is aware of that. I have never made a statement on it. Perhaps, you might like to reflect on why you were happy to serve under the man who fully supported what you referred to as the lake in the ground in Cardiff Bay. However, this debate is not about the Conservative Party—although Peter Law would like it to be—it is about this administration and why it now comes before us to tell us that the new figure will be £47 million. Not only that, but they seem to have had a row with the developer and are examining all sorts of other options, including—laughingly enough—what appears to be some sort of private finance initiative.

When we mentioned £50 million, we were accused of exaggerating wildly. It now seems that we were wrong and that we had under-estimated the cost. I am somewhat new to public life. I came here two years ago having spent time running a small business, where if we lost so much as £100 I had to explain myself. It seems to me that having lost millions of pounds like this, someone in this building should be considering their position.

I do not believe that there is a word in Welsh or English to describe what has occurred but I must say frankly that we must stop the project now and spend the money on something useful in Wales.

Richard Edwards: It is a matter of concern and misgiving, to say the least, that events have developed in this way. Many questions need to be answered. Clearly, costs cannot be allowed to spiral totally out of control and if that means goodbye Richard Rogers, then so be it. I note all the Tory amendments, and have to say that I am not taking any lectures on what we need or do not need from a party that, for 18 years, cocked its snook at Welsh democracy, denuded all our public services in the process and built no children's hospital of which I am aware—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order. These amendments have been moved by the Welsh Conservative group. I wish we could agree that at the request of the Welsh Conservative group we do not use the expression 'Tories'.

Richard Edwards: I will accept your instruction, Llywydd, and substitute 'Conservative' for 'T-O-R-Y'.

Of course they do not want to invest in our democratic future—they do not believe in it, and they claim to speak for the people of Wales. Let us be clear, a new building is not about individual AMs choosing a nice Chamber in which to sit and debate. I have said before that we are transient politicians—here today, gone tomorrow. This is about investing in our future democracy and in the future wellbeing of all our citizens. That is why we need the new building, not this underground car park. For goodness sake, that building needs to be more than fit for purpose.

Alun Cairns: I regret that this debate has had to be called today. It is clearly not only an embarrassment to the Government of Wales, but to the Assembly and to Wales in terms of how we run our public services. The Welsh Conservative group takes no pleasure from this debate nor from repeating some of the things that we warned at that time—

Cynog Dafis: These events are a cause of embarrassment for us all. I feel sick about the way that people say that this is some kind of an embarrassment for Wales, as if it is a reflection of our inability in Wales to do these things. Has Alun Cairns heard of the Millennium Dome, of Portcullis House and the Pompidou Centre in Paris? Do those countries become ashamed and accuse themselves of not being able to run their own projects and businesses properly because projects fail? Can we grow out of this self-deprecation and this continuous self-abasement? Can we face a problem, try and resolve it and leave it at that?

5:50 p.m.

Alun Cairns: I am disappointed that Cynog Dafis takes that attitude. The mess of this project—and it is a mess—reflects on the whole of Wales. As Members who represent the people of Wales, we must all accept our responsibility, some more than others.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: You want to blame the whole of Wales for the situation that has arisen. Building a new chamber was a political decision and politicians must accept responsibility for that political decision. It is nothing to do with the whole of Wales. It is about political responsibility. What I would like to hear this afternoon is who will accept political responsibility for this situation and for the fact that the costs have inflated? I did not vote for a new building that would cost £47 million. I voted for a building that would cost £28 million. Who accepts the responsibility for the fact that an additional £20 million has been added to this cost? Is there anybody this afternoon going to accept that responsibility?

Alun Cairns: I accept one of Rhodri Glyn Thomas's points, but this situation does reflect on Wales. It is obvious that the Richard Rogers Partnership has caused problems, but the Cabinet and Members of parties who voted in favour of the building must accept responsibility. The Conservative Party must also accept responsibility as we did not stop the project before now.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas *rose—*

Alun Cairns: I will not give way. One person must accept responsibility on behalf of the Assembly and that is the First Minister. I return to my speech.

We expressed concern at the time about the costs. We predicted that the costs would rise. I take no pleasure in the fact that we have been proved right in many of those respects because it is a problem now, as many Members said earlier. I believe it was Peter Law who said that this is where we are. I accept that in many ways. I rarely agree with Peter Law, but I will take that point from his speech. The reasons that were given in favour of the new building by the three other parties at the time of the debate were prestige, status and vision. Lorraine Barrett has mentioned those today. We need to answer prestige, status and vision with cost because that is what it ultimately comes down to. When we sought to stop the progression of the new Assembly building, I asked Members how they could look a constituent in the eye who was waiting for a hip operation when we are spending vast sums of money on a new debating chamber in Cardiff Bay. Some of you might have noticed that I was late in coming to the Chamber today. The reason that I was late was because a constituent came to see me and refused to leave the Assembly building until I could guarantee that she was going to be rehoused. That is the problem we face. The police and officials were doing everything possible to support me, but she would not leave the building until she had a commitment that she could be rehoused. That is the state of public services in Wales and that is the kind of issue with which we must deal.

I accept the principle behind the argument of prestige, status and vision in many ways. However, the ultimate question is at what cost? We are already over £40 million. The figure of £100 million has been mentioned. However, many Members have argued today for a blind commitment to the new Assembly building, no matter what the cost. It is a blind commitment to prestige, status and vision—and for what? For the 60 politicians in this Chamber. What better message to send to the rest of the United Kingdom than to spend the money on a better health service, education service and better housing? That lady did not have to come to the Assembly. That would be a strong message on devolution, not the £50 million—or whatever figure it will come to—being spent on a new Assembly building.

Huw Lewis: One of the most difficult aspects about being in political life, which I am sure that you will accept, Alun, is that you must also consider what happens if you do not do something. Therefore, what is the Conservative Party suggesting today? Are you suggesting that we invest £10 million, which would be the cost of cancellation, in a hole in the ground? Is that the monument to Tory Party saloon-bar politics?

Alun Cairns: Every Conservative Member who has spoken so far has sought to address this matter with dignity, not to carp or capitalise on cheap political points. [*Laughter.*]

David Melding: Perhaps a little levity may not be inappropriate. We are asked what

to do with the great hole that has now been dug for the foundations of the new building. We are supposed to be against landfill sites, but perhaps we could make one exception, and take all the failed policies and all the paper that this Executive has generated and put them in that hole.

The Presiding Officer: Order. Alun Cairns, I draw your attention to the fact that you have gone well over the standard allocation of five minutes.

Alun Cairns: I will draw my comments to a close, Llywydd.

Huw Lewis asked where we stop. It is clear that the Government of Wales and the Minister are prepared to cut their losses in relation to the Richard Rogers Partnership. That may be right or wrong. We are prepared to cut our losses in relation to the Assembly building. The principle is exactly the same. If the Assembly says enough is enough for Richard Rogers, the Welsh Conservative Party says enough is enough for the new building.

Richard Edwards: Point of order, I draw your attention to the fact that you allowed Huw Lewis to refer to the boys' club there as the 'Tory Party'.

The Presiding Officer: Order. I have been trying to catch up with all the indiscretions that have been happening in this Chamber. Huw, will you refer to the Welsh Conservative group accordingly? Alun Pugh, no mention of Tories, please.

Alun Pugh: Of course not, Llywydd.

Things do not always go according to the most meticulous and best-laid plans. Just ask Michael Portillo, who has just been voted out of the Conservative leadership contest.

The Presiding Officer: Order. We are not debating the future of the Conservative Party; we are trying to debate the future of the Assembly building.

Alun Pugh: We have an overrun on cost that nobody wants. Many of us want a building of which the nation can be proud, rather than a multi-million pound hole, which is slowly filling up with rainwater this afternoon. However, we must listen to the real concerns of the people whom we represent. It is a long way from Colwyn Bay to Cardiff Bay, and many people in my constituency will be unhappy at this escalation of costs, and will rightly insist that there must be a bottom line. Edwina Hart is absolutely right to pause at this stage, and examine whether it is possible to deliver a building, at an acceptable price, of which we can be proud.

Rod Richards: I speak on behalf of the independent Tory in the building. We have heard many Members describe how they feel. Dafydd Wigley said that he was livid, Glyn Davies said that he was saddened and Alun Cairns said that he was embarrassed. Looking at the First Minister, I do not detect any of those emotions on his face. Llywydd, you will recall that when the First Minister took over from his predecessor, Alun Michael, some time ago, he wanted several weeks to examine all the papers and documents, and check that everything was in order, so that he could make a decision of his own. Clearly he had seen his predecessor, Alun Michael, say

that he was not aware that the 10-year extension of the lease of this building was part of the deal. That is why I can understand why Rhodri Morgan wanted to take several weeks to ensure that every i was dotted and every t was crossed. At that moment in time, he took ownership of the project and became responsible for it. It was not the responsibility of his predecessor, Alun Michael, nor that of Alun Michael's predecessor, Ron Davies. Rhodri Morgan took charge of the project. The First Minister knows, as do all Government Ministers, that officials advise and Ministers decide. The buck stops with Rhodri Morgan, not with anyone else.

6:00 p.m.

I was outraged when Edwina Hart stood at the lectern to deliver her speech without even offering an apology. It was not that she did not offer an apology to Members, she did not even offer an apology to the people who put us here. She, and the Government, owes them—not only us—an apology for the mess that they have created. As for Mike German, his speech about pausing for time was so complacent that it was nauseating. People have hedged around as to who is responsible and what should happen. The buck stops with Rhodri Morgan. He should resign on this issue because it is his responsibility. You should resign, Rhodri, and resign now. For God's sake, go.

Pauline Jarman: The contents of today's motion and the First Minister cannot be defended. Why else would we be looking for a solution to the matter that we can defend? I ask Rhodri Morgan, or Edwina Hart—or whoever responds to this debate—whether the tender document issued, subject to today's vote, will be based on the original design or on a scaled-down version.

The motion asks us to either lease the building or buy it for an agreed lump sum. We have had too much of 'either' and 'or'. The procurement process has so far been doubtful. I do not know what procurement advice Ministers have received or from where that advice came. My serious concern is that the Assembly could now be threatened with litigation. Has legal advice been sought and, if so, what was that advice? At the end of the day, even though we are all responsible, the main responsibility lies with the First Minister.

Geraint Davies: I am very disappointed with what we have heard today. The cost increase is exponential and worrying. However, we must remember why the Assembly exists. We fought for devolution because we wanted a government of Wales that would be accountable to the people of Wales. Our most important task and responsibility is to bring to account the people who took these decisions. If we fail to do so, we will fail the people of Wales. It is vital, therefore, that the decision-makers are brought to account.

Ieuan Wyn Jones: I have listened carefully to today's contributions. One of the most extraordinary contributions was made by Alun Cairns. He rightly spoke of investing in health, education and other key areas. However, he should remember that it was John Redwood who sent back £100 million to the Treasury. That amount would have been enough to build two Assembly chambers. [Conservative Assembly

Members: 'Your comments are out of date.']

The Presiding Officer: Order. I think that Ieuan Wyn Jones was about to come to the subject under discussion.

Ieuan Wyn Jones: I tell Alun, and his Welsh Conservative friends, that this is not an embarrassment for the people of Wales; it is a massive embarrassment for the Government of Wales. We must have the self-confidence as a nation to hold this Government to account. We must not accuse the people of Wales for this Government's failure. That point must be made today. This is a massive embarrassment. It is not a situation in which we want to be. The Government must take responsibility for it.

Alun Cairns: I sought to highlight, Ieuan, that this reflects badly on Wales, and is an embarrassment to Wales. When you are higher up the learning curve, I am sure that you will appreciate that.

Ieuan Wyn Jones: As always, I am grateful for Alun's advice. It is vital that everyone in this Chamber understands that devolution has brought great self-confidence to the people of Wales. We should not run that down. However, as I have made clear during this short contribution, we have a responsibility to hold this Government to account for what has happened. This situation is an embarrassment. I will be writing to the Chair of the Audit Committee asking the Committee to consider how the contract was determined so far. I accept Alison Halford's point—I listened to it with great care. There is now a case for us to ask the Audit Committee to reconsider this issue.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Do you agree, Ieuan, that it is enlightening, but ironic that Alun Cairns wants to deflect responsibility for this decision from the Government and the First Minister to the people of Wales, and blame them for a decision taken by this Government? The Welsh Conservatives do not want to hold the Government to account. They want to blame the people of Wales and devolution. The Government must take responsibility.

The Presiding Officer: Order. If you wanted to make a speech, you should have indicated that.

Ieuan Wyn Jones: He made an excellent intervention.

David Davies: The Leader of the Opposition's idea of responsible opposition is to fully support the Government in spending millions of pounds on a new building. He then runs away and hides, and says that it has nothing to do with him and that he is not to blame when, suddenly, as we predicted all along, the cost hits £50 million.

Ieuan Wyn Jones: It is responsible opposition to say this: we have already spent £8 million on this building. That money would be wasted if the Welsh Conservatives had their way today. If you support this motion and our amendment, this project will be suspended to allow Assembly Members to consider all options. That is

responsible opposition and not the irresponsible opposition that the Welsh Conservatives are demonstrating. This Government must listen carefully to what is being said in this Chamber today. It is not a foregone conclusion that this Assembly building will proceed. People must be taken to task for the situation in which we find ourselves. However, I hope that the people of Wales understand that we will act responsibly when the final decision is taken.

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): I have listened carefully to what has been said in the Chamber today. I am not surprised that Members have expressed serious concerns about the serious situation in which we find ourselves. I did not reach this decision lightly. We are proposing this early action so that the situation does not spiral out of control. We have tried to keep a tight grip on cost. Listening to the Welsh Conservatives, you could swear that I had squandered £50 million. We have not squandered that money. We took early, remedial action to try to assure and advise the Assembly about the arising problems. The word 'embarrassment' has been used today. I am not embarrassed about coming to this Chamber today. I am sad that we are in this position. The people of Wales must not be embarrassed. They have an open and accountable Assembly, which is trying to discuss the issues concerning the governance of Wales and the new Assembly building rationally. That is the important issue.

6:10 p.m.

Alun Cairns *rose—*

The Presiding Officer: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Edwina Hart: When we talk about the future, let us be clear that, in my opinion, devolution is the future. We are discussing the wider issue of what building will be erected for the democratic purpose, which we want in terms of a new Chamber. It is incumbent on us to have a wider vision, to which Ron Davies referred. His contribution today was particularly thoughtful and I will bear his points in mind. However, regarding William Graham's amendments, it is not that I am not prepared to disclose information, but I must consider commercial sensitivity and other issues at this stage.

I am sure that the National Audit Office will wish to examine these figures in depth and all the books will be open to it. Ieuan indicated that he will write to the chair of the Audit Committee. That is appropriate. However, I must be mindful that I want this project to run. I must ensure that I do not disclose anything that would not allow it to run for the benefit and value for money for the people of Wales.

The Assembly has clearly expressed its will to construct the building, which Richard Rogers designed. This proposal offers us the opportunity to stop and consider whether we can deliver on this. That is the key issue. I understand people's concerns about costs. However, at least we have had the luxury—and Mike German referred to this—of putting the project on hold. They did not put the project on hold in Westminster or Scotland. We have had the luxury to consider the options available.

Nick Bourne referred to the black hole. He refers to the past, but I must bear in mind the future. We can discuss what has happened in terms of these figures, and work out solutions, but I must look to the future and consider what we want.

Cynog commented that we need to be more vigilant in dealing with the construction of public buildings. Any lessons that can be learnt will be learnt from this. As the Minister in charge of this project, I am prepared to accept my responsibility, hence why I came here today. I could have carried on, terminated the contract and gone into recess. I chose not to do that. I chose to make all the facts and figures available and to come to this Chamber and be honest with you. It is a brutal world outside, but the only people who will embarrass us are those who bay on about whether we should have a Chamber. There is no embarrassment in saying that there is something wrong, and to stop, look, listen and learn. It would be appropriate if we could work out a solution.

Alison Halford raised many other issues, which we must consider—

Cynog Dafis: I understand that the Minister will reject the Conservatives' amendments. I would like to hear her comments on those. We sympathise with the reasons for rejecting them. However, we would like assurance, despite that, that all the financial and other information relating to this project will be available to the Assembly so that it can responsibly and sensibly decide on the basis of that information, when a decision must be made in the autumn. May I have that assurance?

Edwina Hart: I will give the necessary assurance, Cynog, as long as it does not jeopardise the future in terms of commercial sensitivity. I am happy to ensure that all information, which can go into the public domain, is made available as soon as possible. I assure you of that, because transparency is the key with these issues. We must be mindful about the future in terms of delivering this project.

I listened with interest to your comments, Lorraine, about the idea of mediation. I will consider that. However, I turn to the amendments. I reject your amendment 1, William, because the Assembly previously decided to proceed with the project, therefore, the amendment is premature at this stage. I am pleased to accept Mike German's amendment 2 and Jocelyn Davies's amendment 3, because they provide a way forward and give us the necessary accountability in the autumn, when we return to discuss these issues in detail. I reject William Graham's other amendments. I must reject them, not because I am not prepared to provide information, but because it is not appropriate, at this stage, for me to give information in this area. As soon as I can, I will give all the necessary facts. I have no doubt that the NAO and the Audit Committee will deal with all these facts and write reports on them.

It is difficult, when I feel so passionately about democracy and having a new Assembly Chamber to stand up and say this today. It is not easy, because I thought that I had done everything properly. I took advice. I considered that advice and

decided to proceed. In some ways, I feel hurt that things have not panned out in the way I wanted. However, I am a politician and I chose to enter this game. I am a Minister, and I have to take responsibility. It was important to discuss this today and it is not an easy decision for the Assembly to make.

Jonathan Morgan: I will be brief. I understand the difficult position in which you have been placed this afternoon as Minister, but I implore you to apologise on behalf of the administration to the people of Wales for the mistakes that have been made. I am sure that they have been made by the administration and not just by Lord Rogers's partnership. If an apology is not forthcoming, the people of Wales will be able to see this Government's arrogant approach—[*Interruption.*]

Peter Law: Is hypocrisy now in order, Llywydd?

The Presiding Officer: Order. Hypocrisy is not in order. I have already ruled on that.

Edwina Hart: I have always tried not to be arrogant in my dealings with people generally, in the Assembly and in my constituency. This is not arrogance; I am stating the facts. I have to be the Assembly's physician on commercially-sensitive information in terms of what actions we take in the future, and what decisions we are likely to make. It would be wrong of me to apologise for something like that, if I did not think that, ultimately, I had anything to apologise for. I will accept my responsibility in this matter and the Assembly's judgment, when all the facts are available. However, it was important to have a proper debate on the future of the building.

I thank the majority of Members for how this debate has been conducted. It is difficult for all of us to believe that devolution is here, but it is sad that one party clearly does not and continues to make the new Assembly Chamber a scapegoat rather than discuss its future, which is the real issue.

Amendment 1: For 9, Abstain 0, Against 42

The following Members voted for:

Bourne, Nick
Cairns, Alun
Davies, David
Davies, Glyn
Graham, William
Melding, David
Morgan, Jonathan
Richards, Rod
Rogers, Peter

The following Members voted against:

Barrett, Lorraine
Bates, Mick
Black, Peter

Burnham, Eleanor
Butler, Rosemary
Chapman, Christine
Davidson, Jane
Davies, Andrew
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Janet
Davies, Jocelyn
Davies, Ron
Edwards, Richard
German, Michael
Gibbons, Brian
Gregory, Janice
Griffiths, John
Gwyther, Christine
Halford, Alison
Hart, Edwina
Hutt, Jane
Jarman, Pauline
Jones, Ann
Jones, Elin
Jones, Gareth
Jones, Ieuan Wyn
Lloyd, David
Law, Peter
Lewis, Huw
Middlehurst, Tom
Morgan, Rhodri
Neagle, Lynne
Pugh, Alun
Randerson, Jenny
Ryder, Janet
Sinclair, Karen
Thomas, Gwenda
Thomas, Owen John
Thomas, Rhodri Glyn
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Kirsty
Williams, Phil

Amendment defeated.

Amendment 2: For 42, Abstain 9, Against 0

The following Members voted for:

Barrett, Lorraine
Bates, Mick
Black, Peter
Burnham, Eleanor
Butler, Rosemary
Chapman, Christine
Davidson, Jane
Davies, Andrew
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Janet
Davies, Jocelyn
Davies, Ron
Edwards, Richard
German, Michael
Gibbons, Brian

Gregory, Janice
Griffiths, John
Gwyther, Christine
Halford, Alison
Hart, Edwina
Hutt, Jane
Jarman, Pauline
Jones, Ann
Jones, Elin
Jones, Gareth
Jones, Ieuan Wyn
Lloyd, David
Law, Peter
Lewis, Huw
Middlehurst, Tom
Morgan, Rhodri
Neagle, Lynne
Pugh, Alun
Randerson, Jenny
Ryder, Janet
Sinclair, Karen
Thomas, Gwenda
Thomas, Owen John
Thomas, Rhodri Glyn
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Kirsty
Williams, Phil

The following Members abstained:

Bourne, Nick
Cairns, Alun
Davies, David
Davies, Glyn
Graham, William
Melding, David
Morgan, Jonathan
Richards, Rod
Rogers, Peter

Amendment adopted.

The Presiding Officer: Amendment 3 is withdrawn.

Amendment 4: For 9, Abstain 0, Against 40

The following Members voted for:

Bourne, Nick
Cairns, Alun
Davies, David
Davies, Glyn
Graham, William
Melding, David
Morgan, Jonathan
Richards, Rod
Rogers, Peter

The following Members voted against:

Barrett, Lorraine
Bates, Mick
Black, Peter
Burnham, Eleanor
Butler, Rosemary
Chapman, Christine
Davidson, Jane
Davies, Andrew
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Jocelyn
Davies, Ron
Edwards, Richard
German, Michael
Gibbons, Brian
Gregory, Janice
Griffiths, John
Gwyther, Christine
Halford, Alison
Hart, Edwina
Hutt, Jane
Jarman, Pauline
Jones, Ann
Jones, Elin
Jones, Gareth
Jones, Ieuan Wyn
Lloyd, David
Law, Peter
Lewis, Huw
Middlehurst, Tom
Morgan, Rhodri
Neagle, Lynne
Pugh, Alun
Randerson, Jenny
Ryder, Janet
Sinclair, Karen
Thomas, Gwenda
Thomas, Owen John
Thomas, Rhodri Glyn
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Kirsty

Amendment defeated.

Amendment 5: For 9, Abstain 0, Against 41

The following Members voted for:

Bourne, Nick
Cairns, Alun
Davies, David
Davies, Glyn
Graham, William
Melding, David
Morgan, Jonathan
Richards, Rod
Rogers, Peter

The following Members voted against:

Barrett, Lorraine
Bates, Mick
Black, Peter
Burnham, Eleanor
Butler, Rosemary
Chapman, Christine
Davidson, Jane
Davies, Andrew
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Janet
Davies, Jocelyn
Davies, Ron
Edwards, Richard
German, Michael
Gibbons, Brian
Gregory, Janice
Griffiths, John
Gwyther, Christine
Halford, Alison
Hart, Edwina
Hutt, Jane
Jarman, Pauline
Jones, Ann
Jones, Elin
Jones, Gareth
Jones, Ieuan Wyn
Lloyd, David
Law, Peter
Lewis, Huw
Middlehurst, Tom
Morgan, Rhodri
Neagle, Lynne
Pugh, Alun
Randerson, Jenny
Ryder, Janet
Sinclair, Karen
Thomas, Gwenda
Thomas, Owen John
Thomas, Rhodri Glyn
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Kirsty

Amendment defeated.

Amendment 6: For 9, Abstain 0, Against 41

The following Members voted for:

Bourne, Nick
Cairns, Alun
Davies, David
Davies, Glyn
Graham, William
Melding, David
Morgan, Jonathan
Richards, Rod
Rogers, Peter

The following Members voted against:

Barrett, Lorraine
Bates, Mick
Black, Peter
Burnham, Eleanor
Butler, Rosemary
Chapman, Christine
Davidson, Jane
Davies, Andrew
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Janet
Davies, Jocelyn
Davies, Ron
Edwards, Richard
German, Michael
Gibbons, Brian
Gregory, Janice
Griffiths, John
Gwyther, Christine
Halford, Alison
Hart, Edwina
Hutt, Jane
Jarman, Pauline
Jones, Ann
Jones, Elin
Jones, Gareth
Jones, Ieuan Wyn
Lloyd, David
Law, Peter
Lewis, Huw
Middlehurst, Tom
Morgan, Rhodri
Neagle, Lynne
Pugh, Alun
Randerson, Jenny
Ryder, Janet
Sinclair, Karen
Thomas, Gwenda
Thomas, Owen John
Thomas, Rhodri Glyn
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Kirsty

Amendment defeated.

Amendment 7: For 9, Abstain 0, Against 42

The following Members voted for:

Bourne, Nick
Cairns, Alun
Davies, David
Davies, Glyn
Graham, William
Melding, David
Morgan, Jonathan
Richards, Rod
Rogers, Peter

The following Members voted against:

Barrett, Lorraine

Bates, Mick
Black, Peter
Burnham, Eleanor
Butler, Rosemary
Chapman, Christine
Davidson, Jane
Davies, Andrew
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Janet
Davies, Jocelyn
Davies, Ron
Edwards, Richard
German, Michael
Gibbons, Brian
Gregory, Janice
Griffiths, John
Gwyther, Christine
Halford, Alison
Hart, Edwina
Hutt, Jane
Jarman, Pauline
Jones, Ann
Jones, Elin
Jones, Gareth
Jones, Ieuan Wyn
Lloyd, David
Law, Peter
Lewis, Huw
Middlehurst, Tom
Morgan, Rhodri
Neagle, Lynne
Pugh, Alun
Randerson, Jenny
Ryder, Janet
Sinclair, Karen
Thomas, Gwenda
Thomas, Owen John
Thomas, Rhodri Glyn
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Kirsty
Williams, Phil

Amendment defeated.

Amendment 8: For 9, Abstain 0, Against 42

The following Members voted for:

Bourne, Nick
Cairns, Alun
Davies, David
Davies, Glyn
Graham, William
Melding, David
Morgan, Jonathan
Richards, Rod
Rogers, Peter

The following Members voted against:

Barrett, Lorraine

Bates, Mick
Black, Peter
Burnham, Eleanor
Butler, Rosemary
Chapman, Christine
Davidson, Jane
Davies, Andrew
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Janet
Davies, Jocelyn
Davies, Ron
Edwards, Richard
German, Michael
Gibbons, Brian
Gregory, Janice
Griffiths, John
Gwyther, Christine
Halford, Alison
Hart, Edwina
Hutt, Jane
Jarman, Pauline
Jones, Ann
Jones, Elin
Jones, Gareth
Jones, Ieuan Wyn
Lloyd, David
Law, Peter
Lewis, Huw
Middlehurst, Tom
Morgan, Rhodri
Neagle, Lynne
Pugh, Alun
Randerson, Jenny
Ryder, Janet
Sinclair, Karen
Thomas, Gwenda
Thomas, Owen John
Thomas, Rhodri Glyn
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Kirsty
Williams, Phil

Amendment defeated.

Amended motion:

the National Assembly, further to its resolution of 21 June 2000, resolves:

to seek competitive tenders for the completion of the Assembly building based on the design prepared by the Richard Rogers Partnership and either lease it to the Assembly or sell it for an agreed lump sum; and pending acceptance of such a tender, to suspend works on the building.

to instruct the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities to bring forward, following receipt and consideration of tenders, a recommendation as to whether the project should proceed and, if so, on what basis.

Amended motion: For 43, Abstain 0, Against 8

The following Members voted for:

Barrett, Lorraine
Bates, Mick
Black, Peter
Burnham, Eleanor
Butler, Rosemary
Chapman, Christine
Davidson, Jane
Davies, Andrew
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Janet
Davies, Jocelyn
Davies, Ron
Edwards, Richard
German, Michael
Gibbons, Brian
Gregory, Janice
Griffiths, John
Gwyther, Christine
Halford, Alison
Hart, Edwina
Hutt, Jane
Jarman, Pauline
Jones, Ann
Jones, Elin
Jones, Gareth
Jones, Ieuan Wyn
Lloyd, David
Law, Peter
Lewis, Huw
Middlehurst, Tom
Morgan, Rhodri
Neagle, Lynne
Pugh, Alun
Randerson, Jenny
Ryder, Janet
Sinclair, Karen
Thomas, Gwenda
Thomas, Owen John
Thomas, Rhodri Glyn
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Kirsty
Williams, Phil

The following Members voted against:

Bourne, Nick
Cairns, Alun
Davies, David
Graham, William
Melding, David
Morgan, Jonathan
Richards, Rod
Rogers, Peter

Amended motion adopted.

The Presiding Officer: That is the end of our exciting proceedings for today.

The session ended at 6.19 p.m.