

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART, ON WEDNESDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2008.

PARLIAMENT HOUSE WORKS

Mr PETER BENNISON, DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, **Mr ANDREW SHURMAN**, DIRECTOR, ARCHITECTS DESIGNHAUS, **Mr ROY CORDINER**, CONSULTANT, **Mr STEPHEN FIRTH**, SPECIALIST CONSULTANT ARCHITECT, **Mr PHIL WALLBANK**, CONSULTANT, WINNING POST PRODUCTIONS, **Mr ARTHUR REID**, CONSULTANT ENGINEER AND **Mr JIM HENRY**, CONSULTANT, WINNING POST PRODUCTIONS, WERE JOINTLY CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Harriss) - First of all can I say on behalf of the committee that even though we are familiar with the Parliament House surrounds, seeing the proposal at the coalface, as it were, is always valuable and we appreciate what has been provided to us this morning both in terms of the visual and the verbal identification of what is going to happen here.

Mr BENNISON - Good morning, honourable members. This submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works relates to the proposed restoration works in the House of Assembly Chamber and televising proceedings of the Parliament. I have been authorised to make this submission on the part of the Speaker of the House of Assembly regarding the proposed restoration of the House of Assembly Chamber and the televising of Parliament. The project consultants will be able to give technical details when requested.

It should also be indicated that the Joint House Committee met in December last year, considered the proposals and agreed to them in principle. The three party groupings have also been consulted.

As background, the House of Assembly Chamber was designed by the government architect, Sidney Blythe, in the late 1930s and it was opened in 1940. The architect used the prevailing art deco style. In the late 1970s the Chamber received an unfortunate makeover, rendering the art deco theme almost unrecognisable. The functionality of the Chamber for members declined considerably as a result. In addition, the introduction of technology and changing patterns of usage by members in the last decade or so have made an upgrade of facilities an urgent priority.

Apart from the facade of Parliament House, the House of Assembly Chamber is the most visible element of the institution, appearing frequently on television in the homes of Tasmanians. The present physical state of the Chamber hardly reflects well on Tasmania. The architectural consultant to parliament, Stephen Firth, was commissioned by the House in 2004 to assess the restoration of the Chamber. His investigation brought up a number of significant issues. Making the Chamber compliant with OH&S legislation was a vital finding. The aims are to return art deco elements to the Chamber while making it an efficient debating and working area.

It is proposed that two new doors be inserted in the side corridors to allow better access for people or members with disabilities. A wheelchair lift will be inserted to allow access to the Speaker's Reserve from the nearby elevator. Disability action organisations have been consulted and they support the project. The new seating will provide access and places for members with disabilities on both front and back benches. A ramp forward of the Bar of the House will allow wheeled access onto the Floor of the Chamber.

The Chamber will be completely rewired, including power outlets for members' computers, revamped lighting, computer wiring, new call buttons, Hansard microphones, television and telephone access.

The 1970s blackwood panels will be removed and disposed of by tender. The aim is to reproduce the original 1930s dark veneer panelling as closely as possible, using local timbers. Some other art deco highlights will be reinstated. The 1930s ceiling skylights will be reinstated, and light improved to OH&S standards. An acoustics consultant will be engaged to advise regarding general acoustics and for Hansard and televising.

The members' seating installed in the 1970s was poorly designed in the first place and is now dilapidated. It requires immediate replacement with ergonomic seats. The desk design has been completed. The primary feature of the revised desk is its suitability as a workstation. The prototype desk and chair, viewed today in the Long Room, will be available for other members' opinions prior to final construction. Their feedback is welcome. Seats will be provided for 17 members on either side of the Speaker's Chair - a total of 34 seats on the Floor of the House. The built-in seating for members of the Legislative Council adjacent to the Speaker's Reserve will be reinstated. These will be used for joint sittings such as for Senate vacancies or on budget day. Seating in the Speaker's Reserve and advisers' boxes will also be upgraded. The Chamber will be recarpeted in plain green carpet, with gold strips indicating Chamber thresholds for non-members.

The press and visitors galleries were virtually untouched by the 1970s works. Ergonomic desks and chairs will be installed in the Press Gallery and repairs will be undertaken in the Visitors Gallery. Another area of attention is the installation of a glass screen in the Visitors Gallery. Consultants have advised that the present railing at the front of the public gallery does not comply with Building Code of Australia standards. There are advantages to such an installation. It would alleviate a potential OH&S and public liability problem should a visitor be injured by falling down the Gallery steps and over the rail into the Chamber. That this has not previously occurred can only be regarded as fortuitous. However, now that the matter has been brought to the attention of the House we are obliged to take action.

A number of complaints have been received over many years from visitors that the debate is hard to hear in the Gallery. Difficult conditions exist for sound reproduction in the Gallery. Unlike most other parliaments in Australia which use a stenographic form of Hansard, Tasmania has always used an electronic recording process. A full screen is desirable in that all of these sound difficulties arising from Hansard microphones and Gallery amplification would be eliminated. It would also allow a viable hearing loop for

people with hearing impairments to be installed in the Gallery. At present this cannot be implemented because of the feedback factor.

Enhanced sound relay, as well as two large flat-screen monitors, will be installed in the Visitors Gallery. This will provide the necessary amplification and eliminate visual blind spots where visitors are unable to view parts of the Chamber from their seats. The screen will also allow for teachers and guides to explain to student groups the operations of the House while in session. Tasmanian Police have previously provided reports recommending the installation of a glass screen for security of members. Some other parliaments have made such installations to prevent potential injury from suspect powders and from other objects being thrown into the Chamber.

The original 1930s Speaker's desk, Clerk's desk and Table of the House have been restored and will be reinstated. Following the success of the lectern arrangement at the Launceston sitting in 2006, three lecterns will be introduced to allow members the option of making their contributions in debate other than from their places.

The Government has made funds available to introduce televising of both Houses and their committees. Present filming of Assembly sessions from the public gallery is another potential OH&S hazard. The House proposes to take up the funding and televise Chamber proceedings and its various committees. This will require cameras in the Assembly Chamber and committee room 2, and mobile units in the Reception Room and Long Room. A control room will be situated on the second floor above the present media conference room. The Legislative Council has also been offered the provision for televising its proceedings and has been consulted. Funds exist within the project to achieve that, but it is a matter for the Council to decide. Five cameras will be positioned in the Assembly Chamber: two each on the Government and Opposition sides and a fifth below the clock at the entrance to the Chamber. This will allow a full coverage.

The Joint Standing Committee on the Working Arrangement of the Parliament will be considering operation conditions and guidelines for telecasting prior to the commencement of that process.

Consultations have been held with the following organisations to assess design and works: members of the House of Assembly, Tasmanian Heritage Council, Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority, the Joint House Committee, Tasmanians with Disabilities, and ParaQuad Tasmania.

The project is timed to be underway following the end of the Autumn sittings at the beginning of July and completed by December 2008. An alternative chamber will be required for the Assembly while work is being undertaken. A one-week sitting is planned for Burnie, two weeks in Launceston and the remainder in the Reception Room of Parliament House.

For construction access to the Chamber, a hole will be inserted from the front of the Chamber near the Speaker's Chair, out through the corridor and into the rear laneway. The area will be secured and sealed, so there should be minimal disruption to officers in Parliament House. Tenants in 10 Murray St will be consulted as necessary. I commend the project for your approval.

CHAIR - Thank you, Peter.

Mr HALL - Having looked around this morning and having perused the documents, I am generally happy with the upgrade and refurbishment of the Chamber. I think it is good - it will restore its functionality and make it attractive. Mr Bennison has indicated that work done in the 1970s was pretty average and, as it stands at the moment, it is probably the worst chamber in Australia.

I do have some issues with the broadcast/television. I notice on page 12 there is a breakdown of the costs of that. I understand that will cost something like \$1.9 million to accommodate both chambers. I have some questions in regard to that. If the capital cost is \$1.9 million, what will be the recurrent costs of running that service? Have those been determined yet?

Mr BENNISON - We have done some investigations on the recurrent expenses and we think at this stage the cost will be in the vicinity of \$120 000 a year.

Mr HALL - To run the whole lot?

Mr BENNISON - Yes. We will be looking at contracting a production firm in to provide the necessary expertise, so that Parliament would not be employing anyone directly as a parliamentary official. It will be a contractual situation.

Mr HALL - I understand that the TV footage taken on any given day will not be archived. It will only be available for a short period of time. Is that so?

Mr BENNISON - Initially that is correct, but provision will be made within the system to allow for the hardware add-ons to provide for archival footage.

Mr HALL - I am just trying to justify in my own mind why we would spend virtually \$2 million in capex and then a reasonably significant recurrent amount. What benefit will it really be to the taxpayers of Tasmania? It seems to me that we are just providing a service for the television stations, if you like, to come in and get a quick grab. Over the last 20 or 30 years they have come into the chambers without any issues if they need to grab some footage. Why do we need to spend all this money?

Mr BENNISON - It will also be available for streaming on the Internet so that anyone who has a computer can view the telecast of the debate from their homes or wherever. When the Speaker went to the Government to seek money for the chamber works, the project was taken on board and at that time it was suggested by the Government that televising would be an advantage. The Speaker decided that it was a pretty good idea and basically he took it from there. The money was made available and so we proceeded along those lines. The Speaker has decided that the House of Assembly and its committees will be broadcast, but the Premier has made it clear that any televising in the upper House is a matter for that chamber and their decision.

Mrs NAPIER - And it was a recommendation of the Working Arrangements of Parliament Committee that streaming would be made available.

Mr STURGES - I do not want to get into a debate over this but, like my colleague, I looked at the costs associated with this broadcasting equipment - and I am often accused of living in the last century - and I think it is very important that we take this opportunity to embrace the twenty-first century in a way that will make the Parliament accessible to all Tasmanians throughout our State with its widely dispersed population. Whilst I acknowledge that there is an initial significant outlay in capital expenditure, I really think it is about opening Parliament up to Tasmanians and becoming more transparent. My opinion is that it is well worth it. I also pose the question that if we didn't undertake this work now, with the cabling that is required et cetera, what sort of cost would we incur somewhere down the track if Parliament decided that is what it wanted to do.

Mr REID - At this point I cannot give you an accurate figure, but obviously there would be an additional cost - both from building works and engineering services points of view - to come back later and put the cabling through, with the associated services and the control rooms and everything that goes with them. So you would probably pay a 50 per cent penalty over and above what you would have paid in doing the project now.

Mr HALL - As my colleague, Mr Sturges, said, we do not want to enter into a debate now. However, I still have some reservations. I think that the money could be better spent in other areas and I just wonder whether there is a great outside interest in having Parliament online. I am not sure about that.

The other issue I want to raise is the acoustics. We discussed this in our preliminary talks. It is a fact that in the upper House at the moment two or three of us are provided with wireless earphones. That is okay, and it works all right to hear the person speaking at the podium; however, it doesn't enable you to pick up any interjections and I find that still a problem. I think it may well still be a problem in the Assembly. I think Mr Bennison pointed out that in other parliaments the Hansard is done by stenographic means, but I do not think it will solve the problem for those people who have hearing impediments. They will hear someone who is actually speaking, but not the interjections, and that is part of the whole process on the Floor of the Chamber. I do not know whether there is a solution to that. Certainly, if you go to the House of Representatives in Canberra, the acoustics are tremendous. You can hear every word that is spoken, every interjection without the need for hearing aids or earpieces and I think that is very important if we go down that track.

CHAIR - Before anyone responds, may I say that in many other parliaments, if not all other parliaments in Australia, there is an individual speaker at each person's sitting location, and they can adjust the volume themselves. You did mention earlier, Peter, that there is a problem of feedback -

Mr BENNISON - Yes, the problem is the feedback with the electronic signals going through to Hansard. We have been looking into this for 15 years and trying to do something about it, but our advisers say that it is virtually insuperable. Having a hearing piece seems to be the logical outcome. Perhaps Andrew or Arthur could elaborate on what has been going on with the acoustics and looking after hearing impairment issues.

Mr SHURMAN - Certainly from an architectural/building perspective, we are obviously looking at the whole chamber in terms of accessibility. I guess that is the fundamental thing in the modern world - accessibility, not only for members in the chamber, but also

for members of the public and the press. That is the way modern parliaments are being addressed around Australia. We are probably coming along behind a series of developments that are happening in other parliaments - Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory - and we are trying to bring Parliament here up to an equal standard. That includes the Federal Parliament, of course, as well. So all of those issues about acoustics are being treated very seriously by us, as is lighting, and we are aware of these issues about hearing the interjections, what will be recorded for *Hansard*, what will come through to individual members and what will also go to the press and the public gallery. We are keenly aware of that. I would like to let this committee know that we are on top of that and we are going to be looking at that in more detail as we go through the documentation if this project is approved to go ahead.

Arthur, perhaps you could explain what systems we are putting in place and how those can deal with this issue.

Mr REID - As we mentioned, particularly regarding the public gallery, every member has his own directional microphone. Those microphones can be muted momentarily but otherwise any interjection or verbal response from the Chamber will be taken through and ultimately end up in *Hansard*. So that feed really is the sum total of what is happening within the Chamber. What is going to be processed and sent out as part of the television broadcast can be not so much manipulated but restricted to the current speaker and therefore there is the possibility of having two separate feeds. How that is brought to assist in hearing impairment can either be through wired means or wireless means, headphones, augmentation loops - the technology is there for any of those. If it is more convenient for something like a Bluetooth wireless link then we could look at that and look at the latest technologies.

Mr STURGES - Chair, I know you have given the time to Mr Hall and I will be brief but I will come back to this TV equipment. Something that had not occurred to me until now is the capacity to use the TV equipment, and obviously it is high-tech by the price it is going to cost. Is there capacity to caption for the deaf who may attend the public gallery? There are a number of TV shows now that have captioning. Will that have the capacity to do that and, if so, what would it require?

Mr HENRY - It does not have the capacity to do it but it has been future-proofed so that that is an add-on if that was required. If down the track that was required, it is an add-on and it will work with the system.

Mr STURGES - Again I am very mindful that a significant feature of the upgrade to the Chamber is to make it disabled-accessible. I am also mindful of works being done in the public gallery to enhance the public's view of parliamentary proceedings. What would it take to add that on to the TV system being proposed?

Mr HENRY - There are a couple of ways it can be done. There is voice recognition software and that is available to add into the system.

Mr STURGES - Chair, would we be able to get a costing on that as an indicator? I know from time to time we have had signers in the Chamber and if we are going down this path now, I think it is worth at least investigating.

CHAIR - We are addressing the mobility disability of people but not necessarily other disabilities.

Mr STURGES - I just thought I would take the opportunity as it occurred to me. Thank you.

Mr SHURMAN - We could take that on notice and send a letter through to you, Mr Chairman.

Mr BEST - Mr Chairman, while we are on that subject, what will be presented is pretty much live as it occurs and that will be streamed over the Internet. Is the access only live or is it available for a certain time to go back?

Mr WALLBANK - It can be either way. As Peter alluded to, down the track we have made allowances to archive all that material but that takes a fair amount of memory and so it is a matter of deciding, as we move forward, which is the best option.

Mr BEST - At this stage then is it feasible that you would archive the day's proceedings at least and that would be able to be accessed that evening - at least at this stage?

Mr WALLBANK - In terms of the day?

Mr BEST - Yes.

Mr WALLBANK - It happens - absolutely.

Mr HENRY - Six weeks - that is for *Hansard*.

Mr BEST - Right. That is pretty good. I have been at a couple of public debates, on ABC Radio and a few other places, where it has been made pretty clear to me that people want that access, so live is good, that is excellent, but if people can access it at the library the next day or whatever that is far better than waiting. I am not criticising Hansard at all, they do a wonderful job, it is just that if people want to read a debate they have to wait for it and even then, as a member of parliament you have to be careful what you hand out. If you hand out the proof you have to make sure that the constituent knows that it is only the draft, not the final. You really have to be careful handing out information like that. I can see huge benefits, certainly for my electorate anyway, in being able to access that information on topical issues affecting people, and also in a school environment. We get a lot of school trips and I can see the benefit there for younger people to understand the importance of being involved. They can see it when they come down to do the tour and that sort of thing.

Mr BENNISON - If I might make a comment about the live feed, one of the chief reasons the working arrangements committee is going to be consulted about this is that other parliaments have gone down this track before. They know what is going on with guidelines and parliamentary privilege matters about live feed and things like that. So these matters need to be investigated and proper guidelines drawn up so that all the members are protected. We do not want any slip-ups. That is the reason it is heading in that direction.

Mr WALLBANK - To add to your question, Mr Best, from the point of view of equipment set up, we are able to do all of those things. It is a question of the protocols and the guidelines that you decide.

Mr BEST - Sure. That is good.

Mr HALL - I have a question under 'broadcasts, television, travel and accommodation, \$40 000'. How does that come about?

Mr WALLBANK - There is a significant amount of software development to fit around the uniqueness of Tasmania, if you like. Every parliament is different. Most of the equipment, if not 90 per cent, is sourced from overseas. There will be significant travel ex Australia to America to design and develop the platform that will suit our parliamentary system. In the case of New Zealand where I was part of the original set-up for the Parliament's televising back in the mid 1990s we spent significant time in America getting the engineers to design something that was unique. Whilst the systems are probably all the same, being the Westminster system, there are uniquenesses to each State in Australia and each government. So there is substantial travel involved in bringing engineers out and also going there to brief them.

Mr HALL - Thank you. I do not want to labour the point on those two issues that I have raised and particularly the reservations that I have. The answers that I have received have not changed my mind, I have to say, so I still have concerns about the broadcasts, television and the holistic benefits for Tasmania, and I still have some reservations about what may be provided in an acoustic sense in that particular Chamber. But aside from that, I will let it rest there at this stage.

Mr BEST - What have been the benefits then in other places from the broadstreaming of Parliament? Has it occurred somewhere else?

CHAIR - Can I just add to that? Have any assessments been made of the take up - if I can put it that way - of the streaming in other jurisdictions? Have any studies been undertaken to determine the public acceptance of the streaming on the Internet?

Mr BENNISON - Not that I am aware of, apart from those parliaments in Canada that have been involved with the cable or satellite television broadcasts. They know how many subscribers they have and, of course, the telecast of those feeds is heavily subsidised by buying airtime from those satellite stations. But we are in a different situation here in that we are proposing to provide signals to television stations and to stream on to the Internet. I suppose we will be able to quantify that amount when it gets going because we will know how many hits we are getting through the Net. But, no, as far as I am aware, there is no relevant data to be had, unless Mr Wallbank has something.

Mr WALLBANK - No, I haven't any detail on that, Peter. But in Queensland there has been a hell of a lot of interest from remote areas. I think your earlier comment was that the whole idea is to provide an opportunity for those people outside the urban areas to have the same access without having to hop in a car and drive from Stanley or Smithton to Hobart to view the Parliament in action.

Mr BEST - I suppose what we are hearing is that if we want public access to our Parliament, irrespective of what may happen outside of here, we really need to put in some of this technology because at the moment people cannot really see Parliament in operation. That is a simple fact. I have been criticised publicly for the fact that there hasn't been access. If we don't put in this technology, we will have a refurbished parliament for ourselves, but the public won't really be able to follow the debate.

Mrs NAPIER - For what it is worth, it was Liberal policy at the last election that we have Internet streaming of what occurs in Parliament House because of the issue of access and the importance of increasing the public's attention on the working and functioning of the Parliament, the issues that are being addressed so that you can increase the public participation in the debates of the day. This increases the accountability of Parliament. Whilst it is a lot of money, if we need to deal with occupational health and safety and the refurbishment of parliament, we want to do it as cheaply as we can but, at the same, there is no point in having to incur at least half as much again down the track in trying to put in technologies that more logically should be put in now.

Mr SHURMAN - It is quite interesting to look at what is happening in our universities and in other fields - this idea of teleconferencing can have a broader educational aspect, so that students of politics in, say, the University of Tasmania can directly access parliament, watch debates, discuss the issues and bring that real relevance to their studies. These are somewhat side issues in one respect, but they are about accessibility and democracy. We have a small chamber - I suppose that is our issue - the public gallery cannot be increased; we have to stay within the chamber and it has a limited number of seats. We also have limited access for the press. So there are a number of reasons why we should jump on the general accessibility issue from a purely technological point of view. As to how you manage it as a parliament, as Peter said, that is yet to be decided.

Mr BENNISON - For large debates in either chamber we will be able to telecast that through to the Reception Room or to a committee room, or you can watch it on your computer. The physical constraints of the chamber have suddenly evaporated as far as the public is concerned.

Teleconferencing arrangements will be part of the televising package.

Mrs NAPIER - Can you elucidate that?

Mr WALLBANK - We are making the whole system portable so that we can do teleconferencing from the Reception Room, from the Long Room and certainly from committee rooms by streaming that out and doing the teleconferencing two ways. That is built into the system.

Mr BENNISON - And hooking into the fibre-optic network so that if you have a teleconferencing facility in another city you can talk to each other.

Mrs NAPIER - This provides the public with an opportunity to see that Parliament is more than just about question time.

Mr STURGES - Absolutely.

Mrs NAPIER - Question time is the more combative element of Parliament. Most of the time members are agreeing with one another more than they are disagreeing. I think a lot of people are interested in that whole issue.

Mr BEST - Imagine how many Internet hits there would have been on the pulp mill debate! I think half of Tasmania would have been watching.

CHAIR - So Peter, does the teleconferencing facility have the capacity to enhance the operations of committees?

Mr BENNISON - Yes, because the standing orders have been changed. At present you can have meetings when members are present elsewhere via the telephone, but with teleconferencing facilities you will be able to see in a far more effective way what is going on in that committee. People at the end of the telephone are always at a disadvantage.

CHAIR - And that could occur, as you have indicated, through fibre optics, with interstate connections?

Mr BENNISON - That is right. If there is a teleconference facility in that place, then the two can talk to each other.

Mr SHURMAN - Interestingly, Mr Chairman, we had a visit from the Clerk of the House from the Western Australian Parliament in December, and they were telling us how they set up a big plasma screen in the chamber to use as a method of opening up public access to areas such as the north-west of Western Australia and Bunbury in the south. They are following your move to have various sittings in various parts of the State as well. It is all about accessibility.

CHAIR - Can we stay with the television stuff at the moment and move to the other areas later?

Mrs NAPIER - Following on from that, one of the features I saw in the British Parliament was a screen that provides an indication of the business of the day and what point you are at. I thought that was particularly useful for members to be informed of what point the debates were at and which debates were coming up. I wondered whether this was a component of this streaming system we are setting up.

Mr BENNISON - Yes, it is. There will be the title of the member who is speaking and the matter that is being debated.

Mr SHURMAN - At this stage there is no monitor or touch screen on your desk. It would have to come back through laptops to do that.

Mr HENRY - From a technical point of view, the system is capable of doing that. That has been built in. There are character generators and feeds to different points. At the moment there is a point in the Reception Room to allow for overflow from the visitors area. Any signal can be put out on that monitor. If you had a DVD for educational

purposes it could be played. The day's proceedings could be played out to any monitor.

Mrs NAPIER - So you could do that?

Mr HENRY - Not a problem.

Mr BENNISON - It is envisaged that the system will also replace the squawk box arrangement, which is becoming antiquated and hard to repair. It is old-fashioned, solid-state stuff and its shelf life is nearly over.

Mr HALL - Replace all the squawk boxes?

Mr BENNISON - That is the proposal. There will also be an improved feed to Hansard under the proposed system. It is not just about television; it's audio as well.

Mrs NAPIER - Regarding placement of the five cameras, it is a concern of members who sit at the rear of the Chamber that often they cannot be seen. I'm sure the Speaker and President would be happy with the camera at the rear of the Chamber. Will this overcome the difficulties of members who sit with their back to the rear of the Chamber?

Mr WALLBANK - We have done some camera location work within the Chamber. We have identified the four positions on either wall. They won't be more than ceiling height so that we get the right perspective. Everyone in the House will be covered. We will be wiring a sixth camera in case we need an extra-wide shot.

Mr BEST - The rear camera will capture both leaders?

Mr WALLBANK - No; the leaders will be picked up from the side cameras. You will get an overview from the camera above the clock - a wide shot.

Mrs NAPIER - The design has 34 seats. Not so long ago, after numbers in the House were reduced, structural changes were made to separate the Greens from the Opposition. I notice on the plan that the Opposition and Greens benches appear to join together. Has consideration been given to accommodating the current size and arrangement of Parliament? Currently there is a considerable gap between the opposition parties.

Mr BENNISON - There still will be in the new situation. If all the front benches were occupied in the same way as now they would not be so occupied in the new arrangement because there would be an extra seat on the front bench. Likewise for the Opposition. You currently have four on the front bench and the Greens have two, but there will be provision for seven at the front and 10 on the back bench. There will be gaps on the back bench. It is possible not to put the seats in but it would harm the symmetry to remove them. There are plenty of chambers where there are more seats than members - like the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Mrs NAPIER - There are also a lot of chambers with fewer seats than members, like the Commons.

Mr BENNISON - Indeed, but we are not proposing to do that.

Mr BEST - Any truth in the rumour that the Speaker's Chair will descend from the ceiling at the beginning of each session?

Mr BENNISON - I couldn't possibly comment.

Laughter.

Mrs NAPIER - One of the more positive features of the new design is the use of Huon pine, to give it a bit of light. It's a very dark chamber otherwise, and I'm not a fan of dark wood.

Back to my other point, was any thought given to the fact that we have three parties? And sometimes we have an independent in the House.

CHAIR - And that presumes you have only three parties. Not long ago we had an independent - Mr Goodluck. We have four Greens at the moment; who knows whether it might go up to five or down to three.

Mr SHURMAN - The reason we haven't put in divisions is for such flexibility. We have designed the seating to be constructed in modules, even the ones on the curve. When we designed the layout we also considered members with physical disabilities, so some chairs or groups of chairs can be pulled out. We are trying to make it as flexible as possible for Parliament. If we put in divisions where we think an independent will be or try to anticipate party numbers we might miscalculate the number of seats. They should all look roughly the same.

Mrs NAPIER - So you can take some chairs out, but leave the desk?

Mr SHURMAN - Yes; the seats are not fixed.

Mr BENNISON - The whole thing is just bolted down and is moveable.

Mrs NAPIER - If there are concerns from the Greens then we have it on record that we have addressed the issue of design relative to the increasing or decreasing size of various parties.

Mr BENNISON - Those things are possible but you would lose the symmetry of the Chamber by removing items from it, but it is designed to be capable of doing that.

Mrs NAPIER - The only thing that would not change is basically the Huon pine table system but you could, if you wanted to, remove any of the back partitions to the seats and/or seats.

Mr FIRTH - The simpler solution is really not to occupy the seats or to take the loose seats out and leave the screen there because there is still an obvious space and the screen still gives you the definition of the circulation space around.

We have designed the panels behind the rear seats to be removable and enable wheelchair accessibility up to the desks so they are designed to be removable but specifically a couple of them have been identified as being more easily removable.

Mrs NAPIER - So if you had a leader of the opposition who had a disability and was in a wheelchair, it would be possible to make changes for that as well?

Mr FIRTH - At the moment we have two positions on the front bench and four positions on the back for wheelchair access but there are modifications in addition to that that if we are forced into a position to look at it, I am sure we would be able to adjust to do it.

Mrs NAPIER - You would deal with it when we had to deal with it. At the moment my thoughts are that both the areas that are shown on the diagram that I am looking at would be most accommodated to wheelchairs being near the door. I can see the logic in that but it might well be that that person needs to be much nearer the Speaker.

Mr FIRTH - There are some future issues that we are going to build in that we are not necessarily going to implement and one of them was to provide accessibility for the Speaker, if the Speaker was disabled. We are putting wiring into the system to enable the introduction of a lifting platform if we needed to so that we can take a section of steps out and do that. So in the same way we can deal with the issues of manipulating the space in the future if we are faced with that, rather than having everything totally flexible at all times, which is not practical when you are hardwiring the services into the vents, which is what we are looking at.

Mr REID - Just on that point. They are not necessarily hardwired in, they are modular, and services can be disconnected from each location. The furniture can be taken out, the services do not restrict that.

Mr CORDINER - I think that the design approach is adaptable rather than all-accessible so that there is capability to adapt to circumstances in the future and that seems to be the approach when Stephen asked other parliaments. The same thing happens with the courts with the justices and so on, to have the ability to, when the occasion arises, to make the judge's bench accessible.

Mrs NAPIER - Only a very minor point - the number of members in the House who need to have access to a telephone to communicate: what thoughts are there in terms of phone linkages?

Mr REID - The data points that you would have seen in the furniture - the two data points - are capable of being either data or telephone, an integrated system, and therefore any point can be configured as a telephone point.

Mrs NAPIER - And we just need to accommodate that through the Working Arrangements of Parliament orders.

Mr REID - Yes.

Mr BENNISON - The consultants have been advised about the Whip's phones and the availability of those in particular spots.

Mr REID - And because they can move around.

Mr BENNISON - That is right, there is flexibility to move those whereas it is a bit difficult at the moment because if that person's seat changes it has to be reconfigured. This is easy, plug in.

Mrs NAPIER - Certain people will want to take their mobile phones in.

Mr WALLBANK - There is also the added advantage of having e-mail access.

Mrs NAPIER - Absolutely. I want to ask a question on the record: with the changes that are being made, what considerations are being given in relation to the impact heating and cooling systems have on the House of Assembly?

Mr BENNISON - At present the system has a tolerance of about four degrees either way of 21, I think, but the trouble we have is that if you have half a dozen members in the Chamber the temperature can be x but if you have 25 members and 50 in the Gallery, the temperature will be y . The constant change between those factors makes it very difficult for any system to cope with. That is the context of what Arthur will say.

Mr REID - Yes. We look at the airconditioning systems as having a fully populated parliament but as Peter said, that can change between the public gallery and the Chamber itself, depending on the number of people. With the addition of the glass screen we will be making the public gallery a separate zone so that will remove the interaction between the two spaces. The base system within the Chamber itself will be altered cosmetically but at this stage there is no provision to increase its capacity, decrease its capacity or modify the controls so any changes to the environment that are occurring at the moment due the zoning between the public gallery and the Chamber will be taken account of because of the separation.

Mrs NAPIER - Are you saying that it is likely to be controlled marginally better?

Mr REID - Yes. It will be better controlled in that loadings within the public gallery will not influence the Chamber, and vice versa.

Mr BENNISON - It should cope better with the fluctuations of population within the Chamber because of the improvements in the control system.

Mrs NAPIER - In the particular design it can become very cold for people sitting on the back bench.

Mr BENNISON - And hot.

Mrs NAPIER - Yes. I suppose it depends on what is happening. And women tend to experience it first.

We have had some discussions about acoustics and as I understand it, you have done assessments about the acoustics. A number of members do have problems with hearing. Who makes the decision about whether it is Bluetooth or what design it might be?

Mr REID - That will come through further design development. We can seek input from other parliaments as to what people are going to have to wear or what their preferences are. With the technology that is available at this point, Bluetooth is one that I threw up but there are many other technologies available.

Mrs NAPIER - It seems to me that most members will want to bring their computers in and the more we can reduce wires in that work area the more functional it is likely to be. I would have thought Bluetooth would be at least considered as part of that system.

Mr REID - Partly that and questions about wireless communication would I think need to go through the working arrangements committee in that the confidentiality or the security of the system needs to be fully examined with wireless technology.

Mr CORDINER - And apparently the functionality of the technology currently is not as good as direct connections and there are certain things that it cannot do - a wired connection we are talking about. Videoconferencing and other high-tech communications are much more feasible through a wired connection than through a wireless connection. It is possible that the quality or the bandwidth is limited.

Mrs NAPIER - What is the procedure whereby these issues will be referred to the working arrangements committee?

Mr BENNISON - As far as the Bluetooth goes and the arrangements for hearing loops, these can be referred to the parties direct. We have been undertaking consultations with the Opposition and the Greens on various issues throughout the project and we would see that as another one. So obviously the consultation does not stop here. It will continue as items are developed in the program. We are looking for feedback on the issue of the seats down there and that sort of issue you raised of course is important as well.

Mrs NAPIER - It is important to get on the record the point that was raised by Mr Hall and others about how important it is to not only hear what a person is saying but also to hear any other comment that is made and the interaction within the chamber.

Mr BENNISON - I am sorry, I was talking about the actual item. You were speaking of what is going to come through it.

Mrs NAPIER - They are probably related.

Mr BENNISON - That is right. The Working Arrangements of Parliament Committee will be considering that.

Mrs NAPIER - The next area I wanted to cover was to get on the record the discussions we had about the public gallery and the seating there. The nature of the discussions was that whilst the seats in the public gallery may be heritage, there would appear to be little point in repadding and refurbishing the existing seating unless we are at least able to deal the fact that the space between the seats is really only suitable for child-sized people. Young children can handle it, but I have seen teenagers up there practically sprawling over two seats. How possible would it be, with some artificial flooring or otherwise, to at least space the existing seats to better accommodate large adults.

Mr BENNISON - We are grateful for the comments that you and Mr Hall made about the seating. Obviously from the inspection we undertook this morning, we had an opportunity to reconsider the proposal. As far as I can see, the only possible difficulty we might have is with the Heritage Council. If we are going to change original fabric we need to consult them, but as far as the administrators of the project are concerned, they are keen to see some real improvements up there, and the suggestions you have made are, I think, very worthy and we will take those on board if we possibly can - subject to the Heritage Council, and I cannot speak for them.

Mrs NAPIER - One point I raise: there are two aisles there from which people can access the seats. If there is to be a change to the heritage nature of the current seating, consideration should be given to three aisles. I know that will cut down on the number of seats, but you quite often find that people sit either side and it is almost impossible to get into the seats. They are clambering over one another and it can be quite uncomfortable. Public convenience needs to be considered - not everyone comes in and leaves at the same time.

Mr SHURMAN - That may have implications for reducing the amount of seating. But with the streaming, that might not be such a problem because streaming will increase accessibility.

Mr STURGES - That is exactly right. You could use the Reception Room when there are big debates.

Mrs NAPIER - Coming back to that issue I raised about the British Parliament - the orders of the day and progress of debates - has consideration been given to having a plasma screen in the Parliament where that information is provided, rather than having it on bits of paper.

Mr BENNISON - As we mentioned, it will appear on the stream, so the streaming webcast will have that subtitle.

Mrs NAPIER - The only issue with that is that it would require that members carry their computers backwards and forwards to the Chamber. I can think of many times when you don't bring your computer with you - you have it down in your office and you come into the Chamber to participate in a debate. You don't always want to carry your computer up and take it back.

Mr BENNISON - No, but I was really speaking about what would be going to members' offices. If you were in the Chamber you would know what was going on and who was speaking. It is really for office use and alerting members to what is going on when they are outside the Chamber.

Mrs NAPIER - I raised it because it is really about whether we need a bit of paper on our desk, cluttering up the Huon pine. Modern organisations would ensure there was a screen available to enable members to refer to whatever was coming up.

Mr SHURMAN - It is quite interesting to review that as architects are constantly putting technology into buildings and that is changing at such a rapid pace. Where it is built into

the furniture I think that is a mistake - one can put in the screen of the current technology and within x years, it is out of date. It is like in aeroplanes. Screens on the backs of seats have now replaced the ceiling-mounted modules and who knows what will happen in the future? It may well be that, provided we have the connection, whatever is provided in the future through your equipment budget can be updated without it affecting the joinery and so on. As soon as you start putting holes in benches, the size will be wrong, or something will go awry.

Mrs NAPIER - I was talking about affixing a plasma screen in one central location, not necessarily giving every single person one - I don't think you need that. That is basically the way they have done it in the House of Commons, and I thought that was a very good idea.

Mr REID - That could be done through the data network or the television network. Yours PA could pick it up.

CHAIR - Any questions that I would have raised have already been raised by other members so -

Mr BENNISON - Just before you go, Sue, Winning Post Productions Consultants have brought in the model of the proposed high-definition camera to show members the size of the instrument.

CHAIR - It is unobtrusive.

Mr WALLBANK - This is a 360-degree pan and tilt high-definition camera.

Mr BENNISON - And, of course, they are all portable. They can be unhitched and moved to various places.

Mr CORDINER - Before we close, I wonder if I could just point to the program of works. We hope to start tendering soon for materials packages. We have a fairly tight window to work in the Chamber, so we will probably approach you, Mr Chairman, about doing some tendering without letting the contract before we get approval. Perhaps that could be taken note of - that our program for getting this preliminary work done is very tight. I know this is what people who come before your committee always say - 'We are under a tight program'. We have adjusted the program quite significantly from last year.

CHAIR - We have a standing arrangement, Roy, that the committee has resolved previously that there is no impediment for a proponent department to go through the preliminary process of calling tenders. But it is with the caveat that if the project is not approved, then anyone who wishes to do so should put their mind to the cost of submitting a tender. That is understood. We don't have a problem with that.

Mr CORDINER - We put that on the advertisement.

Mrs NAPIER - Relative to budget and timetables, it says in here that funding was approved in 2007-08 and 2008-09. How much has actually been spent and is anticipated to be spent within the 2007-08 period?

Mr BENNISON - The Government allocated \$1 million in the present financial year, and the remainder - that is, \$3.5 million - for the year beginning 1 July.

Mrs NAPIER - The next financial year?

Mr BENNISON - Yes.

Mrs NAPIER - I could not see where that actually showed up. Does it show up under 'Parliament' or -

Mr BENNISON - It isn't in the present appropriation because it wasn't allocated until December 2007, so it will be reflected in the forthcoming budget papers. The main construction is not starting until the beginning of July; that is why we have only exploratory costs and preliminary tendering - the \$1 million. The main amount will be spent next financial year.

CHAIR - Thank you all.

Roy, this might be the last time you appear before this committee. You first appeared before it on 13 September 1984. We have appreciated your succinct and precise advice over the years about various projects that have come before the committee. Thank you for your presentations.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.