23rd February 2015 - Disabled People: Hotel Facilities

**Baroness Grey-Thompson (CB):** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Thomas, for tabling the debate this evening, mostly for very personal reasons. Travelling as I have over the years, I have spent a lot of time looking at accessibility. I have spoken previously about use of the internet and technology in helping disabled people, but even now I probably spend more time worrying about the bookings I have made than trying to find hotel rooms in the first place.

One of the problems is the interpretation of what is reasonable. In the lead-up to the debate I spoke to Tracey Proudlock, who is an access consultant. She reiterated the points about reasonable adjustment and that what people want is very variable. Some hotels she has worked for ask for one wheelchair parking space per accessible hotel room, while others do not. She mentioned the complete inconsistency in standards. This is especially the case in new-builds. Many building projects simply slip through the net because there is not enough time to monitor or people do not know what they are looking for. Her company is part of an inclusive hotels network which is looking at providing standards, and I believe that it is essential that this becomes better known. I do not think small hotels necessarily know where to get the right help. Also, some of the larger hotel groups do not do as good a job as they possibly could.

Recently I booked a ground-floor family room for my family, and when we arrived you could see the utter panic on the receptionists’ faces because they did not know where to put us. We were shoved into an accessible room where we found a single bed and a chair bed. We could not actually leave the room because the staff were trying to bring in a mattress to put on the floor for my daughter to sleep on. When I went back to reception to say that I wanted a family room, I was told that they did not realise that disabled people had families; they thought they just had carers. We were eventually moved to a perfectly adequate family room.

If one thing annoys me more than anything else, it is mirrors in hotel rooms. I have absolutely no idea why they are always set at the right height for the six foot six workman who put them up. I can understand it in a non-accessible room, but not in a room that is meant for a wheelchair user. I have also experienced oddly shaped shower seats that do not reach the water of the shower, accessible rooms that were beautiful but