

2019.06.04

7 Connétable R.A. Buchanan of St. Ouen of the Minister for the Environment regarding the use of energy-efficient measures on listed buildings: (OQ.137/2019)

Before I start the question, I have to declare an interest in that I am the owner of a listed building, so if you feel that is conflicted then I will withdraw the question.

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, this is a question; this is not seeking any decision, or influence of policy, it is simply a question. So I think you can ask the question.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

I felt it important to declare it before I started. Given that the Assembly recently voted to declare an environment emergency and, as a result, achieve carbon neutrality for Jersey by 2030, will the Minister advise whether he intends to relax the regulations and restrictions around all grades of listed buildings to permit the introduction of more energy-efficient insulation, glazing and solar-heating methods and systems?

Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade (The Minister for the Environment):

The short answer is no and the longer answer is achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 will require radical changes and significant costs for householders, government and businesses. Now, we are tasked - the Council of Ministers is tasked - to bring forward that plan and that plan will include policy and fiscal levers and I will be reviewing the system of regulation of listed buildings. But in doing so I would flag up that it is a common misconception that you cannot make changes to a listed building and the review that I will do will have to respect our obligations under international conventions and law to look after our heritage.

4.7.1 The Connétable of St. Ouen:

I thank the Minister for his answer, but I think he will also understand that it is not as straightforward as he makes out. Those of us, who own listed buildings, know that installing these systems can sometimes be expensive, complicated ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

This does have to be a question, Connétable.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Would the Minister agree that it is a matter of some urgency that this is looked at, given that older buildings tend to be the least efficient in this respect?

Deputy J.H. Young:

It is quite a complicated business. Planning and building regulations apply. Building regulations currently state that such buildings are exempt from energy efficiency requirements, under the regulations, if any changes unreasonably affect their character and appearance. That is a good principle and, therefore, what we try to do is provide guidelines and they are English Heritage Guidelines, Historic Buildings Guild and they are constantly changing and recently, for example, published guidelines in 2018, on secondary glazing, secondary timber glazing, and so on. It is possible to put solar panels on an elevation, other than the principal one. It is quite a complicated

business and in the review I will look at all those details to see if we can find opportunities. But, as a starting point, generally the answer is no.

4.7.2 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

The Minister will be aware that Deputy Ward of St. Helier, who brought this matter to the States, also took it to a Parish Assembly in St. Helier and that, as a result, we now have a very active working group on the climate change emergency. Does the Minister believe that it would be a good idea for all of the Parishes to declare a climate change emergency and to have these working groups that can be supported by his department and work with them?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, absolutely; stakeholder engagement throughout is always good. I do not think it is the question of declaring formal emergencies; every organisation can produce their own plan. The Council of Ministers has to produce that overall plan. The officers have had an early run at it on some basic principles and one thing I do not yet know is how much additional resource and how detailed that work will need to be. We will see. But, yes, I would be happy to try to encourage a dialogue with Parishes on the detail but, unfortunately, we have a very small team to service this piece of work and, as I said in the main debate, we may have to come back and ask for additional resource if indeed we have to go into a lot of detailed support right across the Island. So, I kind of hedge my bets on that answer, if I may.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Could I just remind Members that this Minister is answering questions without notice, so if we are not able to get through all of those, then we will be able to raise them later.

4.7.3 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Does the Minister accept that there is something of a paradox in his department putting history before the living in today enabling people to presently live in an environmentally efficient manner in their listed buildings? Surely, today and the present has to come before the past.

Deputy J.H. Young:

There is a theoretical paradox, but the Deputy's question, I think, is based on a misunderstanding that it is not possible to change historic buildings at all. That is just not correct. So, what we can expect, the technology will improve to enable us to do so, but at the end of the day, all of our systems in government, we have to find where to draw the line and where that balance is. Looking at the numbers and we are dealing with a very small element; historic buildings represent a very small element of the carbon emissions and compared, for example, to the carbon emissions from transport, which exceed by a country mile, frankly that is where we need to put best attention.

4.7.4 Senator K.L. Moore:

After transport, the next highest rate of carbon emissions is that from housing and so I ask the Minister if he will consider readdressing and reprioritising the importance of efficiency and thermal efficiency in respect of historic buildings, when they are being renovated.

Deputy J.H. Young:

Historic buildings represent around 7 per cent of the total building fabric in the Island, so it is still a small proportion. As far as the contribution of the domestic sector, the figures I have been given say that it is around 17 per cent. Just to illustrate, carbon emissions from road transport are 34 per

cent; so it clearly indicates that we are right to concentrate on road transport but, certainly, domestic energy efficiency has to be part of that agenda. What I am saying is that historic buildings are a relatively small part of that and they present special challenges. But I have agreed to look at it in the answer to the question.

4.7.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Does the Minister not understand economics? Double-glazed windows, not everybody can afford wooden, double-glazed windows. I have had a number of cases and it is time we looked at modern materials, which can give the same impression as the old windows, but afford proper thermal efficiency. Will the Minister look at this and bring the Heritage Department up to date?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I think, an up-to-date heritage; that is interesting. Where we struggle in this Island is that we have signed up to international conventions to protect our heritage. I would be very surprised if anybody in the Assembly wishes to destroy our special quality of our historic buildings. It is more expensive to look after them, but we do not have systems of grants, we are excluded from U.K. lottery funding, which elsewhere is a way of meeting these differences and given the derisory proportion of budget the Minister for the Environment has, there are no funds available for grants. It is in your hands, ladies and gentlemen. If you wish to provide money for grants, I shall be delighted to bring forward a scheme.

4.7.6 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Supplementary? It is quite possible, with modern materials, to give exactly the same impression as the ancient windows, but with a lot more comfort for the people living in the houses, who can then afford to live comfortably. Will the Minister not realise that modern materials can work much better than the Heritage people seem to think?

Deputy J.H. Young:

In my experience, I have seen examples of both the good and bad in modern material in replacement windows, some are dire and awful, others are pretty good and so I agree with the Senator on that. So I have said I will review it, we will look at that, but if you are saying to me will I encourage a system where we allow ugly structures in historic buildings, no.

4.7.7 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Is the Minister saying that he has zero budget to address issues of insulation in housing and other buildings in his current state of play?

Deputy J.H. Young:

This is a new area for me and, as you know, I have not long been provided with the details of the G.H.E. structure budget, because this was being kept under wraps for some time. But I now understand that there is a sum of money, I think it is around about £150,000, which at the moment is going in to support a scheme for energy audits of individual people's homes. I am not sure where we are with this scheme, but we are inviting people to come forward and obtain grant assistance to be able to have an energy assessment that sets out what measures can be done. That is at the moment the priority. We believe that scheme will, in fact, achieve the 2050 targets and, of course, we now know we have to up them for 2030. So, there are some funds but, personally, I think putting it into a broader-based initiative is better than individual grants for the purpose that the Deputy is suggesting.

[10:30]

4.7.8 Deputy M. Tadier:

Given that this is not just an environmental, or a planning issue, it is also a heritage issue, would the Minister and his department consider speaking to the political representative, who has responsibility for heritage, in order to come up with what I think most people want to see in this area is a common-sense policy, which balances the rights of individuals to make sensible environmental changes to their properties with the wider heritage context?

Deputy J.H. Young:

It is interesting, heritage; my answers are all based on the law that we currently have and the policies that the Assembly signed up to last session and I have agreed that I will do a review. Where to find that balance, yes, of course it is going to have to involve a dialogue. The plan will have to come here anyway. But I still say that there is a common misconception that the current laws prevent one making any improvement on historic buildings. I have seen plenty of examples of very successful ones, but they do need attention to detail and it is not an open situation, there needs to be a dialogue with the professionals on it.

4.7.9 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Minister talks about the misconceptions, about not being able to make changes, but there are specific examples that we all know about where people cannot make changes, for example, to their windows. So, it is not a case of people not having the money; it is the law says that they cannot change certain windows and replace them for modern equivalents. It seems to me that the general consensus in here and in the public is that, so long as the aesthetic of the building is maintained in its generality, people do not mind seeing a modern artifice of that window, if it is energy efficient and if it preserves the rights and the ability of those inside to maintain their warmth. Is that not the position that the Minister would wish to come to as well?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I generally share the ideals of the Deputy there. I am prepared to set a challenge to the Deputy: if he will come forward with specific examples where there have been unreasonable requirements put on a particular home, I shall be happy to ensure they get individual attention, to look at them. But generally, because at the moment I do not have the evidence that says that this system is working and it is working unreasonably, but if Members give me evidence, I will certainly follow it up. I can say at the moment, we have the Planning Officers' Society undertaking a review and this review does include this area and I shall be looking at that report. I give a commitment to the Deputy that I will publish it and have a dialogue with whichever Minister it is appropriate.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

I do not think I can add any more to the debate, which has been fascinating.