

2019.09.10

11 The Connétable of St. Helier of the Minister for the Environment regarding the South-West St. Helier Masterplan: (OQ.205/2019)

Does the Minister intend to bring the South-West St. Helier Masterplan to the States for adoption and, if not, why not?

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

I thank the Connétable for his very timely question, because the South-West St. Helier framework is out for consultation until 28th September. Of course, as Minister, I will be considering the responses to both those received and also from the public workshop, which myself and the Connétable attended yesterday and I have to make decisions on Amendments before it is adopted. In advance of that decision, a few weeks away, I considered the merits and demerits of submitting the planning framework for a States mandate. My thinking now is that I am minded not to do so for the following reasons. Practical and legal reasons: firstly, these are guidance documents and they are subordinate to the Island Plan policy. The policy, of course, is decided by States Members. Therefore, the purpose of the guidelines are to give explanations and more detail about what those policies mean, how they may work and be applied. This, of course, is a pretty complex document and there does need to be some flexibility and detail on that and, of course, the key thing I did think, in 2008 the out-of-date Master Plan was approved by the States but that was wholly publicly-owned land. This includes privately-owned land, the majority are privately owned and, in fact, that policy of the current Island Plan gives the option there for the Minister. So, there has been extensive engagement with the community over 2 years, S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company), Ports and previous Ministers and that will continue in detail and so my present thinking is that I will not propose to do so but, of course, consultation goes on until 28th September. I will always listen and see whether there are any major elements that would require me to think again, but that is my current thinking.

3.11.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Among the many ideas that came out of yesterday's workshop, one - and it is not a new idea - was that the latter part of the Esplanade Quarter, which is still to be planned, could be the home of a major civic building for the Island such as a national art gallery. Does the Minister not agree with me that kind of decision needs to come to this place to be approved, so that work can start on it rather than being left on a sort of ministerial wish-list?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, the Constable makes a good point. I am very pleased to hear that suggestion came out of the meeting. I had to leave and for legal reasons I had to make sure that I was not involved in the final decisions, because I would be seen to endorse them. But, nonetheless, I am pleased that idea came out, because I think very much there is quite a strong push for that. But, of course, the site that the Connétable refers to is wholly publicly-owned and, in fact, there would have to be funding in place from Government in order to secure such a project, which personally I would very much like to see and there is probably a groundswell of opinions strongly in this Assembly and outside. So, I will give that thought. The idea occurs to me as whether, or not, all of the aspects in the huge scope of the framework needs to be approved by the States; it may well be the States-owned parts may need to be adopted. I will give that consideration.

3.11.2 Deputy K.F. Morel:

I was recently privileged, as part of my Scrutiny work, to be given a briefing on the North of Town Master Plan as part of this South-West Town Master Plan and one of the things that came out was that, of all the privately-owned sites in that North of Town Master Plan, very few had to be changed, or developed, at all. Given that the Minister has just said that the South-West Town Master Plan is a majority of privately-owned sites, or involves a majority of privately-owned sites, does he expect to see, despite the expense of the consultation, the time, the inputs from Government, does he expect that over the years we will see very little change in the South-West Town as a result of this inability to get the private sector to develop the way we would like?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I think an important thing to understand in answering that very important, but quite complex, question is that what master plans, or planning frameworks, can do is they can provide guidance. On their own, they cannot achieve the delivery of those objectives. That requires money, it requires willing landowners and so on and, therefore, what it does it guides those landowners and others to pick up the ideas in the Government visions and plan and gives them encouragement that we can do so. If you take the North of Town, for example, it is true that development has been slow to materialise in that area, which is a run-down area of Town, but it is good we are starting to see some movement. What we see, in principle, in North of Town is that investment in public domain, public infrastructure, will lead in the longer term to private-sector investment, so investments for example in the Town Park. It was predicted, when that proposal first came back in the 1980s, it would lead to £150 million of private-sector development. We have a proposal on the table, Members know about it, for the land at the bottom of Bath Street and obviously that will be determined in the normal way. So, we are already starting to see that and that principle I expect to happen in the St. Helier framework. But it is absolutely right, the Deputy is right, we need to put more resources and organisation behind working with the private sector to achieve that. That is the role of government agencies, such as the S.o.J.D.C. and other Ministers because, obviously, what planning frameworks do is guide. In the past and this is a very radical idea, it is not in accordance with ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Minister, I am afraid I have to ask you to bring your answer to a close.

3.11.3 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Given what the Minister has just said, would he agree with me that building a new government building on the Waterfront would be the best thing to do; it would give us the ability to build a structure designed for our needs and it would also avoid paying millions of pounds in rented accommodation for our officers every year?

Deputy J.H. Young:

As a principle. I cannot commit on a decision on any individual site, but there is no question that the principle of government owning its own office accommodation is absolutely right; it has been done in the past. In a past life, I was involved with the responsibilities for securing 3 buildings through the private sector into States ownership: Morier House, Jubilee Wharf and Maritime House, all assets, which were criticised at the time and are now worth millions to the public purse. That is an example of how things can be done. So, yes, I agree with the principle, whether or not that is the right site, or not, we have to wait and let us see what the responses are in the public framework. But I say one thing, I do not like the centre at La Motte Street, I get a lot of criticism about it and the planning side is not working well. I am very concerned about on-the-hoof, *ad hoc* decisions on our States assets,

such as Cyril Le Marquand House and all the rest of it. I want to see a proper property strategy. Chief Executive, listen.

3.11.4 Deputy R. Labey of St. Helier:

It is great that there has been such a take-up with consultees in this project, but there is a responsibility to the consultees, is there not? I wonder, given what the Minister has just said, if he has managed the expectations of consultees by informing them that it does not necessarily fit in with the Island Plan; that it will not come before this Assembly; that there is no money for it, *et cetera*.

Deputy J.H. Young:

I do not think I quite said that. If I portrayed that impression I correct it. The funding stream, we rely on S.o.J.D.C. as an implementation arm. Now, I am not privy to the business strategy of S.o.J.D.C. In the past, that body has been required to work with a minimum of investment in the public realm and that is largely one of the factors responsible for some of the things that have not gone well. I am hoping that, in the future, in the new way we work with S.o.J.D.C. as a Government, there will be recognition of the need for public investment. Now, does it conform to the Island Plan? I do not believe there is anything in this framework that discords with the current Island Plan; it follows the visions that are set out in the current plan and have been long there. The community wants to see one area joined up, linked back into Town, a mix of uses and people-centred and, above all, manage the vehicles. The planning disaster of that road has plagued us and a solution has to be found. So those messages, people feel encouraged that things can happen and we have a new chance here and we should take it. But, make no mistake; Government needs to put up some resources. Our Chief Executive has promised us a public infrastructure; I cannot remember what he has called it now in the Government Plan. It is mentioned in there, there is going to be a report coming I hear. I want to see that. This is about major projects, putting investments into those major projects, public money and this is one such area that I want to see happen. So, if we get it right and we keep the public momentum going, it is not a negative message.

3.11.5 Deputy R. Labey:

In which case, I ask the Minister: should revenue raised on the Waterfront from the sale of International Finance Centre buildings not be ploughed back into the Waterfront, back into that area, to improve the public realm?

Deputy J.H. Young:

In principle that is the way these urban regeneration bodies work. But I am not privy to the business plans of S.o.J.D.C. What we have is an arrangement where the Minister for the Environment does what I have just explained and it is the Minister for Treasury and Resources at the moment who has the job - and it is a difficult one - of co-ordinating all those business plans. So, there is no question about it; the whole principle of private and public sector is a pound of public money should generate £10 of private money, but over the long run. The public money has to be up front; it needs to be pre-invested, do not leave it until late, because what you get is marginal development and piecemeal and all the rest of it.

3.11.6 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Can I preface my supplementary question by saying that Senator Mézec, Deputy Doublet, myself and the Dean, probably take exception to having the North of Town described as run down? We all live there and we enjoy it. The worry I have about this not coming to the States is amply illustrated by

some of the questions that have been asked. One Member saying: "Let us put the Government building down on the Waterfront." I do not think the workshops were apprised of that. Another Member saying: "Let us spend all the revenue of S.o.J.D.C. on the Waterfront itself" when the States has time and time again reiterated its pledge to reinvest the money from S.o.J.D.C. in urban regeneration projects, such as the North of Town Master Plan, which has been on the shelf at Planning for years. My worry about this master plan is: will it be implemented?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I would like to withdraw and correct my remarks about North of Town. They are probably historic, and I was referring back to before the Town Park existed and I remember the work on that plan because, at that time, it was in desperate need of regeneration. What we have seen and the Connétable and other Members, we have seen it come up and that was my answer to the Deputy; that it is coming up now. The private sector have good confidence and we need to keep that going. So, will it happen? I will do my best planning-wise and policy-wise to help it happen, but it is up to other Ministers and the Council of Ministers and, in the end, this Assembly as to what instructions it gives to Ministers about those priorities and spending decisions.