

23.10.03

12 Deputy T.A. Coles of the Minister for the Environment regarding the air quality monitoring being undertaken in the vicinity of the Enid Quenault Health and Wellbeing Centre (OQ.185/2023)

Will the Minister indicate what air quality monitoring, if any, will be carried out in the vicinity of the Enid Quenault Health and Wellbeing Centre?

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

Historically air quality was monitored at the old Les Quennevais School site using what is known as a passive diffusion tube as part of the Island-wide air quality-monitoring programme. Diffusion tubes measure pollution cumulatively over a period of time, they do not measure short-term peaks and troughs. The site, when it was a school, had a long-term trend of good air quality. As an example, in 2020 the annual nitrogen dioxide mean average was 5.1 micrograms per cubic metre, and for comparison the E.U. (European Union) limit is 40 micrograms per cubic metre, so well underneath the E.U. standards. The diffusion tube for that site was moved to the new school when it opened in 2021, so there is an option for officers to re-site a diffusion tube at the Enid Quenault Health and Wellbeing Centre which would enable comparison with historic data from the time when it was a school. However, with limited resources and in the knowledge that previous data did not indicate a significant air quality issue at the site, the decision will depend on managing the monitoring assets that we have and putting them in places of greatest risk.

3.12.1 Deputy T.A. Coles:

Given that the building has changed purpose, so where a school would have had peak periods of a.m. and p.m. possibly would have had a larger concentration of students walking there, now to a well-being centre to cater for all Islanders coming from east and west, that the increase in traffic in the area may affect the data results. So, therefore, would the Minister then maybe put the point that the air quality may have changed and when the resource becomes available it should be there to check and compare?

Deputy J. Renouf:

As I indicated previously, I am certainly prepared to consider it. I have been to a couple of meetings, public meetings with residents with the Minister for Infrastructure, who have raised concerns about traffic issues on the site as they have changed their views. I would say that the last meeting we went to last week indicated a considerable easing of those concerns. There has been, as the Minister for Infrastructure mentioned in a previous answer, monitoring carried out during the first month of operation of the site, and the traffic issues have not been significant yet but we both will stand to react should there be changes in that situation. I think the team running the hospital have a very acute sense of the fact that they are operating in a residential neighbourhood and will certainly alert us should there be issues which in terms of air quality would relate to traffic but at the moment we do not see a huge issue that would need responding to.

3.12.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am not sure how the Health Department can alert us to air quality issues in Clos des Sables near the old school if the air quality monitoring is being removed. So does the Minister accept, not just as the Minister but also as a St. Brelade representative, that it stands to reason that traffic flows will increase to the area and that residents' concerns have not diminished? At the end of the meeting which we were both at there were repeated concerns about traffic calming measures in the area. So

would the Minister agree that it should not be a choice of an either/or between whether the air monitoring goes on at the new Les Quennevais School or the old one, that it very much needs an air quality control monitor now in order to assess whether the situation changes?

Deputy J. Renouf:

There are a few premises in that question that I have issue with. I do not think it is automatically the case that there will be increases in air pollution due to traffic. The traffic in the school period was dominated by peaks of traffic during the beginning and end of the school day. The traffic now is spread out over the day. That is likely to lead to greater dispersion of pollution and less likelihood of concentrations building up over short periods of time. But, as I have said twice now, I stand ready to react should there be an indication that traffic levels are building up and traffic is the key issue, since that is the source of potential pollution. The question of whether we should do it as well is fine in principle but we do have limited resources; therefore, choices have to be made. In this case the choice will be on the risk-assessment basis of where do the greatest risks lie? We are currently investigating the siting of, in fact, about to put in new sensors as part of a new sensor network around some schools in St. Helier.

[11:00]

There are some sensors going in I think around Helvetia School in relation to the traffic scheme that is being proposed there so that we can have information for that. There are also proposals to put in air quality monitors around the other schools in town. I would be very happy to brief either the Deputy or the Assembly as a whole about that new sensor network, which I think is a significant move forward and there are some things which we are very much looking forward to the results of getting that in place.

3.12.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I feel like we are in a chicken-and-egg situation here. Les Quennevais is one of the most concentrated residential areas in the Island and certainly the most in St. Brelade. In order to say: "We will monitor the situation to see if air quality deteriorates but we will not be able to monitor it because we have not got anything to monitor it with but I am willing to react if I am asked to do so" well, the Minister is being asked to do so now, I think, by Members in the Assembly, where there was monitoring before and we know that there is change in traffic. So rather than speculating, will the Minister respond to my request, if nobody else's request, to immediately put back the air quality monitoring in Les Quennevais so that we can have real-time data to see what the changes are, whether it has got worse or better?

Deputy J. Renouf:

It is not a chicken-and-egg situation, the situation is to do with traffic. We know what the traffic situation is because it has been monitored for the last month. We also know that in a previous situation when there were a lot of traffic movements connected with the school, the data suggests that the pollution levels around the school were one-eighth of the E.U. limit; very, very much below. Therefore, we have to take a decision about where best to put resources; they can be moved around. I am certainly prepared to consider moving them around but I would have to say that this is not a decision just about putting something at Les Quennevais. It is a decision about taking it away from somewhere else, for example, the current school. So it is a choice, it is not just the case of saying: "We will just go and find another one from the back of our pockets and find another diffusion centre and put it in there." We might also want to take a more targeted approach and put in one of the new sensors which measures peaks and troughs rather than average sensors. So that is something that

we should look at, but we will look at it in the round because we need to consider all the sites which we would want to monitor. As I say, my starting point is that the background levels at that site over many years have been below, but well below, what would be considered dangerous limits, and we have other sites which are at risk. We are monitoring the traffic so we will know if there is a potential for the main source of pollution to have increased and in that situation we can react.

3.12.4 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Given the movement these days from hydrocarbon-powered vehicles to electric vehicles, has the Minister got evidence of a reduction in pollution levels?

Deputy J. Renouf:

That is a very broad question indeed.

The Bailiff:

Also, I am not sure it is within the terms of the original question, Connétable. I mean, this relates to monitoring carried out in the vicinity of the Edith Quenault Health and Wellbeing Centre, not general information sought about air quality or monitoring in connection with electric vehicles.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

My point is, if I may, that in the light of more electric vehicles appearing on the market, will the effect of those vehicles reduce the potential for air pollution in the area of the Edith Quenault Centre?

The Bailiff:

Thank you very much, that is an acceptable question. Yes, Minister.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Yes, in principle, of course, certain emissions would reduce with the increase in E.V.s (electric vehicles). Not all emissions, some of them are to do with brake dust and tyre wear, but certainly the things that we currently monitor for, nitrogen oxides, particulates and one other thing I have forgotten, for the carbon compounds, then there would be a reduction of that, and that would be welcome and is indeed a generally welcome outcome of the move to E.V.s. Of course, we are also trying, and I know the health team are trying very much to encourage people to travel to the Enid Quenault Centre either by, certainly in terms of staff, bicycle or foot. There is also a bus service which has been diverted into the estate to service the hospital. Again, people are being encouraged to monitor that, so I think on lots of grounds we could hope in the future that there will be slightly less pollution in that area.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I thank the Minister for the answer.

3.12.5 Deputy T.A. Coles:

Given that the Minister for Infrastructure said there was going to be no formal traffic monitoring and the evidence that is currently gathered seems to be mostly anecdotal from a member of staff, would the Minister indicate what the trigger would be to see air quality monitoring take place?

Deputy J. Renouf:

There is a very active community forum in Clos des Sables and in the estate area around that, and they have no hesitation in letting us know when issues have arisen. We have a member in the Health

team who has an overall responsibility, I believe, to manage the relationships in the area, along with other work that they do. I do not have any doubt at all that if there is a spike in issues relating to traffic and therefore air quality or other things that might affect air quality that we would know about it. I repeat - repeat - that I would certainly be happy to do that monitoring work should we feel that there is a reason to move urgently in that area, otherwise it will be considered along with the general programme of siting of monitors that we are doing, and will, I am sure, become part of that programme, particularly as schools and health facilities are our priorities for us in terms of measuring air quality. So, it is certainly something we are going to watch and I am absolutely convinced that the triggers will reach us very, very quickly should that happen.