

23.12.11.

6. Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for the Environment regarding La Folie Inn (OQ.243/2023)

Will the Minister commit his support to the delisting and demolition of the former La Folie Inn and, if not, will he explain why not and state his vision for the future of this building?

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

If I may start by apologising for not being present in the Chamber. I have a chest infection and I think it best, particularly in deference to those who sit near me, that I attend remotely. Turning to the question; I cannot support delisting and demolition of La Folie because it would be inappropriate to do so. I need to avoid prejudicing my position in case there is a future appeal relating to the site, whether that relates to a planning application or to delisting. What I can say is any demolition proposal would need to be considered within the context of a request to delist the building and require a justification as to why it is no longer of special architectural or historical interest. Vacancy and disrepair are not reasons to remove a building from the list. The management of change to any listed building or place is best considered through the process of a planning application and any such proposal would be judged against the relevant policies of the bridging Island Plan. My own view about the future of La Folie Inn, as it is about any vacant listed building, is that it should be brought back into a viable use, whether as a pub or something else, to ensure its sustainable long-term maintenance and to protect its heritage significance. There have been many successful examples of this kind of repurposing and I hope that as Ports of Jersey continue with their development plans for the harbour, they will bring forward proposals that safeguard the future of La Folie.

2.10.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

There was a question posed way back in 2009 by a fellow St. Brelade Deputy, of which the Minister and I now represent, which said that La Folie Quay is currently being master-planned by Jersey Harbours, W.E.B. (Waterfront Enterprise Board) and Property Holdings with the intention of maximising the greater value of the whole site for marine leisure in the long term. That is already 14 years ago and Deputy Howell was asking why the site had already been vacant for 6 years. When the Minister says that he wants to see the site repurposed, possibly as a pub, can I ask what active steps and conversations he has had with fellow Ministers and maybe Ports of Jersey, to make sure that we do not have to wait another 14 years before we get the same answer from a future Minister for the Environment.

Deputy J. Renouf:

That is a fair comment there, in a way. It is disappointing when buildings stay out of use for so long. What I can say is that the redevelopment of La Folie does form part of the harbour master plan. A public consultation was undertaken in the autumn of 2022 and I am told that it has recently been agreed that the Ports Policy Ministerial Group have decided that Ports of Jersey will undertake a high-level request for information exercise commencing in January to find out if there is interest in the development of visitor accommodation on the La Folie site, as well as the restoration of the former public house. I would say that work is planned. I think it is also fair to say that for Ports the redevelopment of the Elizabeth Harbour is the absolute priority at the moment but they are also undertaking work to progress the redevelopment of La Folie.

2.10.2 Deputy M.R. Scott:

Will the Minister express his views on whether what has happened with La Folie is indicating that system by which Government seeks to protect historic buildings is essentially broken, because they can simply be allowed to deteriorate and in the end will be demolished anyway?

Deputy J. Renouf:

I would not call it broken. I think we have a system whereby there is, in extreme circumstances, as was mentioned by Deputy Jeune in the last sitting, order powers to improve derelict buildings, to make them safe and so on. It is the preferred method to work with the owners of property to find ways to redevelop them. There have been many successful examples of this type. We have done this at a very large scale, where you can think of turning a Victorian fort into a leisure centre or a Jesuit college into an educational establishment or an educational establishment into housing. We have also done it on many small-scale examples. The aim is to work with the owner of the property to bring it back into use.

2.10.3 Deputy M.R. Scott:

Would the Minister not accept that the actual approach he is taking in terms of conservation areas so far suggests that he thinks Government should be giving handouts to owners of these buildings and whether, in fact, this is a sustainable way of supporting our architectural heritage?

Deputy J. Renouf:

No. We have moved slightly here on to conservation areas but the conservation area power that was passed by the last Assembly to give grants is the same as for listed buildings. It is a power that exists as a theoretical power; it requires money to be allocated through the Government Plan for it to actually happen. As was pointed out in the previous Assembly, that has not been the case for some years. In fact, I think the last grant was given some 10 years ago for listed buildings. I do not think that we have a problem. The problem we have there is not being able to give money where we might want to do so. If we bring the subject back to La Folie, I think it would be a stretch - a very great stretch - to expect the public to put money forward to the redevelopment of La Folie when it is owned by Ports of Jersey, who have income streams that they can utilise and a very large estate where they would be able to find resources, I would expect, within their operating budgets and so on to be able to fund that once they have come up with a scheme that safeguards the long-term future of the site.

2.10.4 Connétable K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:

I did ask a question in the last Assembly meeting regarding La Folie and the sea scouts. Does the Minister have a timeline for the redevelopment of the La Folie area? Does he not only believe that the organisations like the sea scouts should be provided for as it would make an excellent parade ground directly in front of it and it should not just be about profits for Ports of Jersey?

Deputy J. Renouf:

As I say, I think the indications are that Ports will be asking for expressions of interest in terms of use of the site in the future, as in starting in the new year. I have not asked them about the question of sea scouts; I am happy to do so. I know the Constable has a particular interest in this area and I would be very happy to include him in those discussions. I think it feels like something that should be taken up with Ports in more detail. It may be that there is an appropriate solution there, it may be that there are appropriate solutions elsewhere.

2.10.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

I believe that there is a wider vision for this area, which can stretch from the Weighbridge right through commercial buildings to where La Folie Inn is up to Fort Regent, which could be Jersey's new cultural quarter, if the Government had the vision to do that. Will the Minister agree to look into a creative thinking, which may involve direct Government support? Would he also look into the fact that La Folie could be reacquired by Government directly? That conversations could be had with

Highlands College and the construction industry to rebuild La Folie and to run it as a direct department of Highlands College for the hospitality faculty to bring much needed practice, expertise and a revenue stream back into that area.

Deputy J. Renouf:

There was quite a bit there but if we focus on the La Folie related elements. I am not sure I would agree that it would be appropriate for the Government to take it back into use. It is worth remembering that the listing of La Folie is complemented by other listings; for example, of the English and French harbours, and they form a unit. To have those under single ownership feels to me to be a good thing and abstracting one of them from it, and therefore putting it into a different set of strategic priorities and so on, does not feel like the right way to go forward. I think we do have to wait for Ports of Jersey to come forward and say what they think their vision is for that. That is something which will obviously then be open for consultation, and I think it will be very interesting to see what thoughts that stimulates. I do not particularly want to prejudge that at the moment. We do have arm's length organisations charged with doing that work for us and, as I say, I do think, as it is part of a unified site extending and covering quite a large area, that it is appropriate for it to stay under one ownership and for it to be developed in that way.