

24.02.06.

9.12 Deputy J. Renouf of the Minister for Housing and Communities regarding regarding the redevelopment of the St. Saviour's Hospital site. (OQ.17/2024)

Will the Minister explain what steps he will take, if any, to ensure that plans brought forward by Andium Homes for the redevelopment of the St. Saviour's Hospital site will respect and protect the heritage value of the grade one listed building?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec (The Minister for Housing and Communities):

It is not impossible that the Deputy may know more about what has happened up until this point than I do myself now, as I have not had a direct update from Andium on it. But what I can tell the Deputy, I am a Minister who cares very much about Jersey's architectural heritage. I respect the grade one listed status of the building and the lawn in front of it and I would not like to see anything done to jeopardise the heritage value of that site. In conversations that I have with Andium Homes, I will be making it clear that is an expectation that I have.

9.12.1 Deputy J. Renouf:

I am very pleased to hear that. I think the point I would make is that we have had recent excellent talks from the Association of Jersey Architects, which include presentations by Simon Allford, former president of R.I.B.A. (Royal Institute of British Architects), and Christophe Egret, both of who argued strongly for the retention and reuse of heritage buildings. Would he agree with me that when he talks to Andium Homes about the redevelopment of the site that that should be a priority, particularly avoiding what is referred to in recent supplementary planning guidance as façadism, i.e. just the preservation of a façade of the building rather than the building itself with its integrity in its setting.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I completely agree with that. To protect, enhance and get the best future use out of an old building like that, it does not necessarily mean protecting every single brick, but it does mean I think doing more than just a superficial element of it. We can see examples, not just in Jersey but around the world, of efforts that have been made to preserve the architectural heritage of buildings and even have them inspire nearby buildings as well. That helps add to the character of an area. Having such an old and fantastic building like the old St. Saviour's Hospital there, that provides what I hope will be an opportunity to try to strike as best a balance as we possibly can in creating a new and vibrant community there. But in the context of something that is an important part of Jersey's history that I will be making it clear I want as much done as possible to protect and preserve.

9.12.2 Deputy D.J. Warr:

I am conscious I have probably got a bit of an advantage on the Minister on this particular question in connection with St. Saviour's Hospital. One of the aspects of this hospital is the issue around viability. I am very conscious that Andium have drawn up a scheme and are questioning the viability and how they can make the maths stack up. I understand that the Island Plan says it is an affordable housing site. Would the Minister consider part affordable housing, part private, as a way of bringing this scheme forward?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

There are clauses in the planning rules that allow for viability tests and for the percentages that are otherwise dictated to be altered if it can be proven that is the only way of getting something to be achieved. I would not allow for a situation where large parts of that site were levelled to the ground to

make things easier. If it requires us to look at things again and have a different approach and work with the new Minister for the Environment and new Minister for Infrastructure to get the right balance there, then that is something of course that I am prepared to do. But I do not believe in taking what in one sense would be the easy route out, which is to just say do whatever you like with the site. I think we have to be tougher than that.

9.12.3 Deputy L. Stephenson:

I was very pleased to hear the Minister refer to creating a vibrant community here because obviously his title does include “Communities” as well, and we know that good housing is not just about the 4 walls that a person lives in. With that in mind, what steps will he take to ensure that the redevelopment of this site includes quality amenity and community facilities, particularly those for play and sport and recreation, while of course respecting and protecting the heritage value of the listed building?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I think those are things that the supplementary planning guidance considered as well. You can add in transport links to that too so people can get around adequately. We know that is an area with a lot of pressure for school places too. So all of these things have to be considered. The supplementary planning guidance was put out for consultation. I do not think it is done yet, so I think we would have to look at that when that process is complete to make sure that it strikes the right balance. But I want that to be an extremely pleasant place for people to live, and that means having a good place for children to play, good space for families to get together and enjoy themselves, and so I want to see that included in whatever scheme we come up with. Just imagine what a beautiful setting it will be if we preserve that wonderful building there and have that adding to the character of that new neighbourhood.

9.12.4 Deputy L. Stephenson:

It is my understanding that I think the supplementary planning guidance certainly in relation to play is still outstanding. Will the Minister, with all of that in mind, take it upon himself to chase up where that guidance could be, because I think it would be hugely beneficial for those bringing forward such schemes to know.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

A very good point. If that is outstanding, then that should be chased up, but I do not think that should stop us in the meantime from saying, if you are going to have a housing development where inevitably lots of children are going to be living, we do not need to wait for that to know that it is the right thing to have decent facilities for those children to play and socialise with one another.

9.12.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

It is not just the fabric of the building of St. Saviour’s Hospital, which I think is important, but the history of it itself. It is one example where the Lieutenant Governor of the day rarely had to intervene with a States decision to exercise the power of veto because the States were extremely reluctant to spend money on a purpose-built asylum, and one has to wonder whether they were scared of the competition. But more importantly, does the Minister believe that there is a more fundamental way that we need to make sure we look after our public buildings and perhaps privately-owned ones, one of which is to make sure that we fully account for the deterioration and depreciation of those buildings by putting adequate funding in place year on year and building up funds. Also making sure that the funds that were depleted to allow grants to be allocated for heritage buildings should be reinstated and restored.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I think I can answer that by saying most of the practical applications of what he has just suggested would fall outside of my remit; I think they would fall to other Ministers. But I agree with everything the Deputy just said.

9.12.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

I suppose the supplementary has to be that, in the spirit of collaborative working, would he make those views known to Ministers who do have that remit to all pull in the same direction to protect our important history and heritage?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Yes, of course, and I think that the St. Saviour's Hospital site probably provides a good springboard for doing that.

9.12.7 Deputy P.M. Bailhache of St. Clement:

Given that St. Saviour's Hospital was originally part of the health estate, would the Minister consider working with the Minister for Health and Social Services to reserve part of the accommodation for nurses and other health workers so as to encourage the recruitment of these much needed workers?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Not necessarily. It is quite a bit out of the way and I know that there are plans for the health village just very nearby to where some of those health facilities currently are, so I would not rule it out on that basis that some workers would benefit from having close proximity to their place of work if they have key worker accommodation there. But with the wider health property portfolio, to be honest, that might not be the best site, and there will probably be other places that are closer that would be more convenient for them, especially if they are new to the Island and have not quite got to grips with how to get around yet.

9.12.8 Deputy J. Renouf:

It is encouraging to hear a Minister balancing these different priorities. Can I urge him to maintain his resolve if he comes under pressure to compromise on the heritage versus the housing supply/housing viability side of things, as these tensions are quite common in development issues and I think the heritage value of our key grade one listed buildings, which means that they are of international significance, should be very high up in our list of priorities.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

I thank the Deputy for his encouragement on that and I hope that, as well as that encouragement, he will be able to provide his share of the political pressure as well, in case anything comes back that does not strike that right balance. But certainly while I am sat around the table, I will be making my views absolutely clear that the heritage value of the site and maintaining and preserving it is of paramount importance.