

2.8 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains of the Minister of Transport and Technical Services regarding the maintenance of grassed areas:

Would the Minister advise what resources have been allocated to the maintenance of grassed areas under his department's control in each of the last 5 years?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye (The Minister of Transport and Technical Services):

I very much regret it is not possible to identify resources solely for the maintenance of grass areas in current, or indeed, previous years, as budgets are allocated to specific locations rather than to specific tasks. However, in an effort to be helpful, as a result of a requirement to identify efficiency savings for the period 2004 to 2009, the parks and gardens section of my department developed a strategy to reduce its budget by £730,000 over this 5-year period. This will ultimately result in a reduction of 19 gardeners and groundsmen from the original workforce of 91. We are currently in year 2 of this 5-year plan and the overall effects on service levels are evident in certain areas. In order to minimise this impact it has been necessary to prioritise the work that is carried out with, for example, low priority grass verges being maintained to a lower standard than before.

2.8.1 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

Yes, I am grateful for the Minister attempting to separate out the costs. But does it occur to him that the current state of our grassy areas (and I am thinking here of possibly South Hill; beside La Mare car park and so forth) is now beginning, through these efficiency cuts, to look rather unkempt and could possibly lead visitors to wonder whether in fact we are abandoning our Island. I would also point out to the Minister, Sir, that there are, on occasions, noxious weeds such as ragwort now growing in these areas. Does the Minister work with perhaps the Minister for Economic Affairs - wearing his tourism hat - in order to achieve the most attractive result from the resources available?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

There are occasions from time to time where my department has liaised with the Economic Development Department, particularly with the Tourism Development Fund on various projects such as putting flags up along Victoria Avenue over this summer. I am delighted that the Deputy has cited, in fact, an element of his home patch at La Mare. The Assistant Minister and myself inspected that area only yesterday afternoon, and I have to say I disagree with the Deputy's subjective view on this issue. That particular grass verge - which is quite extensive and runs from the bus shelter all the way to the car park - is in what I would describe as verdant condition and currently luxuriates in quite a thick undergrowth of harestails, although I have to confess I am not particularly a biological or floral expert. I think it looks extremely attractive, and indeed that appeared to be the opinion of the various people who were taking in the sun on the benches nearby that particular grass section. I am not competent to spot a ragwort, I regret, but I have to say that this is a matter of some subjectivity, and I have to disagree with the Deputy.

2.8.2 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I wonder if the Minister could tell us when that grass was last attended to? Could it possibly have been a few days before his arrival, which I believe was in fact the case?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Well, I can assure the Deputy it is not my impression that my staff somehow toured before me like some rather bizarre royal tour. Indeed, they would not have known that I was likely to visit this area. It was an outing undertaken spontaneously and without warning by the Assistant Minister and myself.

2.8.3 Senator L. Norman:

Would the Minister not agree that the work carried out on the particular site was carried out within the last 2 weeks, following a complaint that I made to the department about the condition of this particular verge, including ragwort, which is growing wild and in abundance on this particular site?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

It appears both the Deputy and the Senator have the advantage of me. My department are not in the business of telling me precisely which verge they are cleaning when, and as I have indicated in my original answer to the Deputy, we do not keep records of when grass verges are dealt with. But if the Senator is telling me that the matter was attended to in the last 2 weeks, then I have no reason to dispute that.

2.8.4 Connétable T.J. du Feu of St. Peter:

Would the Minister confirm that the maintenance of all these greens around the Island is indeed the responsibility of a private contractor? I am not up to date with the state of the St. Clement greens, but around the west of the Island, if they wait much longer to maintain them, they will be cutting the next crop of hay off all the verges.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I very much regret that if former members of this Chamber saw fit to cut nearly three-quarters of a million pounds from our Island-wide cleaning budget, there will be net consequences, and clearly we are beginning to see those. We also have a new culture in terms of the inability to use strong pesticides, which would make the problem much more manageable, but not very eco-friendly. This is a difficult issue that I will be dealing with in the course of time, but regretfully, when budgets are cut, I have to advise Members there are clear and obvious consequences.