

2.8 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding conditions imposed for the reinstatement of a staircase in the De Gruchy Department Store:

Will the Minister advise what conditions, if any, were imposed to ensure the reinstatement of the staircase in the De Gruchy Department Store, and when will they be enforced?

Senator F.E. Cohen (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

On 9th December 2002, the Planning Committee before last granted permission to redevelop the building on New Street and to refurbish the remainder of the De Gruchy Store. The consent was subject to the transfer of 16 New Street to the National Trust for Jersey. The approved plans showed the relocation of the ornate staircase from the ladies' department to another location in the store. However there was no requirement of the Committee of the day to retain or reinstate the staircase and the permit was not conditioned. Indeed it may have been difficult to condition the permit to require this as only the King Street façade and the arcade were P.S.S.I.s (Proposed Sites of Special Interest). The consequence of the lack of a specific condition in the permit is that I am unable to insist on the reinstatement of the staircase. Furthermore, worryingly, I was advised last week that very little of the staircase remains and only part of the handrail survives. The present owners do not presently intend to relocate the staircase I am informed. This is a very regrettable situation, particularly as this is not the only significant interior historic feature the Island has unnecessarily lost in recent years. Had the De Gruchy staircase situation arisen under the present system I would have been able to require its retention or reinstatement as a planning obligation; a system wisely conceived by my predecessor, Senator Ozouf. Finally, I wish to apologise to the Deputy as she was not provided with comprehensive information by my department at the time of her initial inquiry in April.

2.8.1 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I would like to thank the Minister for his response, and notwithstanding that he has apologised to me not receiving comprehensive information from his Department, I would state that in April I received information saying that the Minister will insist on the reinstatement of the staircase and in June I have correspondence stating that the Minister has no legal powers to require its reinstatement, and I wonder if the Minister would advise whether there is any confusion within the Planning Department?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am afraid it is appropriate to hold my hands up on behalf of my department and senior officers and say that the advice given to the Deputy and to myself was wholly inadequate and there is nothing I can say or do to correct that. It is perhaps a consequence of an under-resourced department but it is most unsatisfactory. I have implemented very recently, as a response to this issue, a new system of manual card indexing which will apply to States' Members' questions. I hope that will improve the quality of the advice given to Members.

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

Could the Minister inform the House, is he aware that the same issue has presented itself at Voisins Store recently, and can he enlighten us as to whether he is aware of it, and secondly, if he is aware of it, are there any conditions that perhaps were missing on the De Gruchy's?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am afraid I am not aware of it. I will get my department to carry out some accurate research today and will distribute the research to Members later in the day or tomorrow.

2.8.3 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I would just like to ask the Minister whether there has been any similar confusion in his department concerning the replacement of the granite arch at St Paul's?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

No, I am not aware of any similar confusion, but no doubt there will be other areas of confusion within my department. However, as far as I am concerned the arch will be reinstated, it is a question for an appropriate place.