

2.8 The Deputy of St. Martin of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding repairs to St. James Church

Will the Minister inform Members how long the scaffolding has been erected at St. James Church, why is it there, how much is it costing, when it will be removed and whether the building has been considered as a suitable venue for the proposed National Gallery?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):

There are 4 questions there so I will take an indulgence; it may take more than the appropriate 30 seconds. The scaffolding was first erected in September 2006 and has now been in place for nearly 2 years. It is there, in the first instance, to facilitate access to carry out an inspection of the defective elements of the parapet and roof, the 2 towers, and to facilitate access to carry out any necessary remedial work. For health and safety reasons, the scaffolding has remained in situ at St. James to prevent the risk of injury to members of the public from falling masonry while the building remains in use and before repairs are carried out. Delays have been caused because of the complexity of establishing the best way to repair the defective pinnacles and high level masonry. Property Services are working with the States historical building advisers to ensure that we find the best solution, balancing the need to preserve this historic building and the cost of so doing. The cost of scaffolding - scaffolding hire costs is £15,500 for 2008 and likely to increase next year. However, erecting and dismantling the scaffolding costs considerably more. So it has been more cost effective to leave it in place while awaiting a decision. When will it be removed? Well, no date is set for the removal of the scaffolding. The scaffolding will only be removed when the outreaches of the towers have been repaired to remove the risk of masonry being detached. The building is a registered proposed Site of Special Interest and any works which deviate from the like-for-like rebuilding of the structures, are contrary to policy G13 of the Island Plan. However, unfortunately, the funds are not currently available to progress full reinstatement works. Hence, we are working with the Planning Department to find a solution which might enable the scaffolding to be removed. The final question, has the building been considered for National Gallery? No, to date we have not been asked to consider this use, however given the controlled environment needed for such a gallery, it is unlikely that this building would be suitable.

2.8.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Given the maintenance costs of the building, is it really in the public interest to maintain it and would it not be better to sell it?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

That will be an option but to sell a building in its current state without any established use for it may not be very beneficial either but that is an option which has to be considered.

2.8.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I have asked questions about this and it is interesting to hear some of the answers this morning. My understanding is that the scaffolding remains in place because of not only the decision to conduct the work, but also in relation to a safety element. Does the Minister think it is responsible of the States of Jersey to continue to leave scaffolding around the building partly due to a safety concern when it should be taking some money that it has from the general reserve to correct that safety element, and does the Minister think that this would be acceptable in the private sector?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

We do not have a general reserve and we do not have any spare funds. It will be for the department concerned to decide whether spending that sort of money on that building is an appropriate use of the funds. Given the desire of the States to constrain its spending, I think that decision will have to be taken very carefully and at this stage I could not recommend that spending vast sums of money on St. James is good value for money.

2.8.3 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Is the Minister then suggesting that to continue to leave scaffolding in place around the building that may be in a precarious state, is the best practice that the States of Jersey will engage in and does he or does he not think that would be acceptable in the private sector?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

If the Deputy was suggesting that we are doing nothing that would not be acceptable. We are not doing nothing if you pardon the double negative. **[Laughter]** We are working with the Planning Department to see how a cost effective solution can be delivered in order that the scaffolding can be taken down and the building restored to a good state of repair.

2.8.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Can I press the Minister for whether or not he believes that would be acceptable in the private sector over this length of time?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I have no idea, Sir. The private sector will probably decide one way or the other to sell the property at an earlier stage purely on commercial grounds. The States have to weigh up commercial, aesthetic, cultural and other uses before coming to a decision so it is not quite as simple as the private sector.

2.8.5 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:

Will the Minister advise the House what consultation has taken place regarding this building with the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture and, maybe more particularly, with his Assistant Manager with responsibility for culture?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The use of the building by, I think it is, the Jersey Arts Trust is a matter for negotiation between the Minister and that Trust and I do not get particularly involved in those consultations, so I cannot really comment on what consultation there should have been regarding its uses, but I know that the Arts Trust is conscious of the need to use its own resources in the best possible way, and if the Deputy has any concerns about those uses then I think she needs to direct those questions to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I would just like to say that the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel will be doing just that.

2.8.6 Deputy J.J. Huet of St. Helier:

Going back to the Minister saying that he did not think this building would be suitable for a proposed National Gallery, would he not think that a building that has got an S.S.I. (Site of Special Interest) on it, will hopefully be opposite a lovely town park, would be the Odean Cinema which would be ideal for a National Gallery?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think that is drifting a little from the question, Deputy.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

In that case, I will not speculate on whether the National Gallery is a good thing and where it should be placed. That is a matter for another day.

2.8.7 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Would the Minister accept that the real problem is that St. James Church, like so many other examples of similar buildings, is the fact that it is burdened by an S.S.I. label which effectively

means you cannot do anything with it and we have got ourselves so confused with the labelling of historical buildings that our policy now is to maintain them with no use and build and develop on green fields?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I think that is going a bit too broad. The policy for S.S.I. is one for the Environment Minister but I think whether that building was a Site of Special Interest or not, if it were to be disposed of it would still need to be put into a fit state for disposal unless one was going to consider it for demolition. That is not considered appropriate at the present time, but if environmental policies change as the years go by that is quite possible. At the present time, we are where we are, as the saying goes, and the building needs to be preserved in its best possible state.

2.8.8 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Can the Minister inform us when he will be taking the decision as to whether the building is viable to be repaired and, thereby, starting the process of removing the scaffolding?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

As I said in my answer, it is a matter of negotiation with the Planning Department as to what can be an appropriate method of doing this given the relative costs and benefits of various options.

2.8.9 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

When, Sir, does he finish those negotiations?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I honestly do not know the answer to that one, but the answer would be as soon as possible but when as soon as possible is ... is as long as a piece of scaffolding is. **[Laughter]**

2.8.10 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I am reminded of a song: "Until the 12th of Never." Would the Minister not undertake on our behalf to agree to pursue the issue prior to the next elections where it may be that people are asked to conduct their voting in that building and where we are admitting that the scaffolding is in place due to some safety issues? Is it adequate that we are using a public building for members of the public for entertainment and also for voting when, by our own admission, we have got scaffolding around it because of safety issues?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

There are 2 things there. Firstly, I would hope that this work would be completed long before the election time. When I said I do not know how long, I was thinking in terms of days and weeks rather than months and years. But can I remind and reassure Members that the scaffolding is there in order to preserve safety. The building and its surrounding areas are not unsafe. If they were unsafe they would be closed off. Purposely, because measures have been taken, the public can continue to use the building in perfect safety.

2.8.11 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Given the concern being expressed this morning in the Chamber, would the Minister give the House an assurance that he will look into the matter and come back in 2 weeks with a report to give us an update as to what is going to happen with the building?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I cannot guarantee it in 2 weeks' time. I can certainly undertake to bring back a report in conjunction with the Planning and Environment Minister as soon as possible.

