

2.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Minister for Economic Development regarding the potential importation of construction workers for the Waterfront Development:

Has any permission been granted to or discussed with a potential developer of the Waterfront to import a large number of construction workers and, if so, what is the policy in regard to such applications?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf (The Minister for Economic Development):

No permissions have been granted in respect of workers for the Esplanade Quarter. The discussions that have occurred have emphasised the need to give local workers and local businesses full and first priority in order to secure work. As the Deputy will be aware that is the published policy of Economic Development in respect of construction projects. I would add to the Deputy that I find it inconceivable that a license would be issued to engage a substantial number of non-locally qualified workers if suitable locally qualified workers were available to work. I can also say to the Assembly that I have asked Jersey Enterprise to prepare, in the event of a contractor being appointed, to run a 'meet the buyer' event to ensure that local contractors are given also the first opportunity to tender for the work.

2.6.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Can the Minister, therefore, confirm that he and hopefully his successor will not allow a condition of a development to be that numbers of imported workers become part of that development?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

On the contrary. The published policies require there to be an allocation of work for locally qualified people first. It is only when the department is convinced that all locally qualified people have been taken up, do we allow non-qualified workers. I would remind the Deputy that the manpower return that has been published - the last one on the 30th June 2008 - consisted of 5,300 workers in the construction sector, of which 500 were locally qualified and 30 were category (j).

2.6.2 Deputy A. Breckon of St. Saviour:

I wonder if the Minister could say if the contract is monitored. Once the permission is given are there any checks taken about who they are employing and if they are complying with any conditions laid down by Regulation of Undertakings?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I can say 2 things. First of all, over the last 3 years I have spent a great deal of time with department officials in discussion with construction workers to make sure that all of the existing licenses that were in operation have been run appropriately and there have been spot checks carried out on construction firms in order to ensure compliance with their licenses. The Deputy will also be aware that there is a manpower return that is required to be completed every 6 months with a return so I would give the Assembly reassurance that not only are there strict safeguards put in place to the license but that is monitored on an ongoing basis.

2.6.3 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

Would the Minister confirm that under Reg. of Uns. - I think he partly tried to answer the question - that once a contract is passed ... in his first answer to Deputy Roy Le Hérissier he said: "If we have enough skilled workers we will not be importing." On this project, if going ahead, the Minister and everyone in this Island knows we do not have enough skilled workers: will the Minister undertake to make sure that he or his successor... **[Aside]**. This was brought up at the hustings that, in the contract, whoever is employed takes on some local youngsters to up-skill them to tradesmen so that by the end of this contract there will be enough of the skills on the Island that are needed.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am slightly concerned that the Deputy is already writing my end as an Economic Development Minister. I am not sure where she thinks I am going but certainly as far as any successors are concerned it is absolutely clear that the requirements of the Population Office to issue licenses are to primarily ensure that locally qualified labour is there. She is absolutely right and I know that we have discussed this at the Economic Affairs Scrutiny Panel on a number of occasions that more needed to be done to ensure that local construction companies were taking on apprentices and to ensure that the excellent skills that are being taught at Highlands College are able to be taken up in terms of workers. A lot has been done for construction companies. We have had all the big construction companies in to see us and a condition of the licenses are that apprentices are taken on, et cetera. So I would give her reassurance on that. In the situation that a contract is granted for the Waterfront, we will have to allocate additional non-qualified workers on a case by case basis but then the overriding requirement of Regulation of Undertakings is to manage the resources of the Island. It may well be as other construction projects have happened in the past that this is done on a staged basis and not everything will be permitted at the time.

2.6.4 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Sorry, just a supplementary. He said 3 times: "Local companies, local companies, local companies." My assurance for the ... hopefully he will be the new ... if that is what he wants to be. **[Laughter]** I make no presumptions. My question was if whoever is there will give an undertaking that it is all companies, especially if it is a big company from outside, that there is something written in the contract that they have to take unqualified and maybe apprenticeships from the local youngsters on this Island not just local companies?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I can absolutely give that reassurance. It is absolutely a requirement that any company operating in the construction field is required in the first instance to take on local... the issue of ownership of a construction company is relevant in some considerations but the most important thing for the Deputy to know is that an equal measure of stricture is put on non-local companies in terms of employing local people.

The Bailiff:

Sorry, I will just alert Members to the fact that I have seen a large number of lights flashing. I am prepared to allow 3 more supplementary questions. I have seen Deputy Scott Warren, Deputy Power and Senator Perchard.

2.6.5 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren of St. Saviour:

Can the Minister give Members an assurance that the talk of the importation of a large number of construction workers for this development is a myth?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I cannot, I do not think, add any more than I have just answered in the way that applications are dealt with by construction firms. In the event of this Assembly going forward with the Waterfront development we will ensure that all local labour is used in the first instance. If there is a requirement in addition for additional non-qualified labour then that will be taken on a case by case basis. But I have to say all indications are is the construction industry has certainly slowed in recent weeks and we are expecting it to slow further in the wake of the economic downturn. I would imagine that this Assembly would welcome the additional amount of work that the Waterfront could give as an economic stimulus to the economy.

2.6.6 Deputy S. Power:

Would the Minister not agree to me that the possible origin of the story of the 500 construction workers coming to the Island for the Waterfront development was largely based on a request to the

Jersey Hospitality Association by a developer to assess winter bed capacity and that the figure of 500 is largely erroneous?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am aware that there have been some discussions with one of the local construction companies that did enquire to the Hospitality Association - through the offices of the Housing Department obviously joined with the Population Office - as to whether or not the possibility of re-designating some 2 or 3 star hotels could be useful in the event of a non-qualified labour component being allowed in the license. That seems to me to be a fairly sensible approach for the construction company to make. However, that is the second solution for finding the labour. The first solution for the labour is the local labour force.

2.6.7 Senator J.L. Perchard:

The Minister said a moment ago that any company operating in the construction field is required to demonstrate every effort to employ locally. Could the Minister explain why his noble policy on supporting local construction companies does not extend to local engineers and architects?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Senator is well aware of the requirement to employ local staff for construction companies, et cetera. If the Senator is trying to get me to suggest that engineering and architects firms, et cetera that are non-locally owned is relevant to this then I am not sure that he is barking up the same tree. I am dealing here with questions for the construction companies and construction workers that are worried about whether or not they are going to be in employment over the next few months