

2.8 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding measures to improve the way in which applications for large projects are handled:

Will the Minister identify what measures, if any, he is planning to introduce to improve the way in which applications for large projects are handled?

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

Islanders rightly have a poor regard for our large building built environment. I have sought to change this to improve the process and to promote an interest in delivering large buildings of exceptional architectural quality. This, of course, has to be complemented by the higher standards of construction. The policy, in my view, is already succeeding and we now have a number of internationally renowned architects working on large projects in the Island, some in partnership with local architectural practices. We have seen a significant improvement in the standard of proposals. I am employing a number of tools to ensure that we deliver better large projects. The first was a requirement to produce physical models. This simple and essential tool was extraordinarily absent from planning requirements when I was appointed. I have also issued a variety of Ministerial design guidance notes and will shortly be releasing a Jersey Design Guide. I established a design review group to assess schemes and to promote an interest in architecture within the department. I established a key post of a qualified department architect. These measures ensure that architecture of new larger buildings is now properly assessed. The process is cumulative and this week a note will be issued requiring that new large commercial buildings must incorporate the mechanical engineering plant within the design of the building. This will put an end to the proliferation of ugly roofscapes littered with plant and machinery. I am complementing architectural measures with requirements for new buildings to be of the highest environmental standards. In the case of the very largest applications, I will be using the new system of public planning inquiry, the first of which will likely be the Waterfront.

2.8.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister not acknowledge in the case of a project like the Les Ormes Adventure Park, that what was missing there were not various architectural advice, for which he has to be praised I should add, but environmental advice; and similarly what was missing at Portelet, despite the attempt to place the blame sadly upon the National Trust, was a call for broader contextual advice about the environmental, the landscape, and the special impact of projects like that?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I was certainly not seeking to blame the National Trust. I hold the National Trust in the very highest regard. The point I was trying to make was that it would be helpful if they entered the planning process at the front end rather than at the back end, that was the point I wanted to make. Les Ormes I did not consider, as I have said before, to be a large application. It was presented to me on the basis of being a small application and I gave it the consideration that was appropriate based on the documentation I had. I would most certainly have benefited from additional information, however that does not mean that the decision would have been in any way different.

2.8.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister who famously and courageously said that he had too much unfettered power; is he bringing proposals forward to limit his power or to share it with others of a similar ilk?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I never said that I thought I had too much power. What I said was that I wondered when States Members established Ministerial government whether they considered how much power they were placing in the hands of one person in terms of the planning application process. I do not have any current plans to fetter my powers, but may consider that in the future.