

5. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Minister for Planning and Environment The Bailiff:

That brings questions to the Minister for Social Services to a close. So we move on then to the second period which are questions to the Minister for Planning and Environment.

5.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Can the Minister clarify what, if any, consideration is given to the reasons applicants quote when applying to, say, demolish a hotel to replace with luxury housing? I ask this in the light of being aware of one hotel which we are told is being demolished due to a drop in business, yet the Manager informs me last year was the best year they have ever had in terms of tourism.

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

All applications are considered on their merit and all representations are taken into account. Simply because a hotel is profitable would not in planning terms be a specific reason for refusing consent for conversion or demolition and replacement with residential accommodation.

5.2 The Deputy of St. John:

In the proposed new Island Plan I note that there is a presumption that Thistle Grove will become a big industrial site, something 5 or 6 times larger than is currently on site. Obviously this raises concerns given a new farm was built which will be incorporated in that industrial area only several years ago after having moved from another farm unit. I sincerely hope the Minister will look carefully at not allowing farms to go out of agriculture so that farmers are capitalising on land yet again in these areas. Secondly, within that site, I note there are polytunnels on land which could be returned to agriculture which are being designated as an industrial site. I would like the Minister's views. Finally, will there be a road show around the various Parishes, please?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The position is that the Island Plan is currently out for public consultation. I would urge the Deputy if he has a particular view on this site or any others to make a formal representation. I can assure him that that representation will be taken into account and will be dealt with by the inspector when the matter is considered in the public domain. As far as a road show, there are no plans presently to take the Island Plan around Parish by Parish, but I can assure the Deputy that there are significant plans for appropriate and proper consultation on the Island Plan. Remember this is the first time that the Island Plan has been examined by an inspector in public so we have that additional level of public consultation within the process. But I would urge the Deputy and any other Members if they have a view to make a representation.

5.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Minister assure Members that the consultation process on the Hopkins Masterplan and subsequent parking solutions to enable the development of the town park will be put through as quickly as humanly possible?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Yes, I can give that assurance.

5.4 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

Are there any plans to have an agricultural land bank and to monitor the land currently in the industry and if any land is lost?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The land in the industry is currently very carefully monitored and carefully assessed, both through my department and through work conducted through Economic Development. There is no, as far as I am aware, plan to develop a formal States-owned land bank, however.

5.4.1 The Deputy of Grouville:

Are there any restrictions within Planning when land is changed from agricultural use to leisure use?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Yes, there most certainly would be, but they would be determined specifically in relation to the application and would be clearly contained and detailed on any planning consent relating to the change of use.

5.5 The Deputy of St. Mary:

What happened to the commitment not to rezone green fields?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The Island Plan review draft document contains some rezoning. Unfortunately, there is a very fine balance here. It is very difficult. We need to provide some land for new housing and at the same time we also want to preserve the countryside and to preserve green fields. I would say that this is a draft document out for consultation. The final document, the final draft, will of course be the cumulative results of the representations made by the public and of course by States Members, and if the Deputy has a particular view on this matter, again, I would urge him to make a representation and I am sure that representation will be considered by the inspector as the draft plan progresses.

5.5.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Does the Minister not agree that it is unfortunate that here again we have rezoning proposals both for brown field and green field sites and we still have no way of controlling the increase or getting at the increase inspector to value and that leads to perceptions in the public which are most unfortunate?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

It would have been preferable to deliver an Island Plan draft document with no rezoning proposals at all, but I am afraid that that just was not possible if we are to adequately balance our housing requirements. All I can say is that we have done our best to minimise the amount of land that we are proposing for rezoning and this is out for public consultation.

5.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Can the Minister inform the House of any status of any actual plans submitted on the already rezoned green fields for the housing for over-55s and how many are likely to be coming on line shortly and that amount, please?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The Trinity programme is underway. There are other applications in at present or coming in at present, but all I can say is that the matter has been significantly delayed because some of the site owners are endeavouring to change the type of housing or swap around the housing on the sites, which we are, as a department, concerned about. It is my view that if there were any significant changes, and I say significant changes, to the proposals for those sites that I would intend to make sure that this House had some say in any such changes.

5.6.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Sorry, just a supplementary. When he says changing around, could you give an example? I mean these were specifically for over-55s. Are we talking 4 or 5-bedroom town houses now in the country?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

No we are not. I do not want to be too specific about the particular sites, but where sites were for multiuse, so for example, first time buyer or over-55, open market or over-55 social, there have been some efforts to combine those particular uses on sites where the numbers remain the same, but the uses per site change.

5.7 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

Could the Minister tell us, please, whether when considering approving planning or development applications he considers access and whether it is in fact restricted or reliant on closing of public roads, which might in fact be of detriment to those living in the area?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

This relates to a particular application and I am not entirely sure of the answer. I am waiting for some advice at the moment of whether or not such an issue is a valid planning issue in relation to determining an application. But what I can say is access generally is, of course, of material importance in determining a planning application.

5.8 Connétable G.F. Butcher of St. John:

Could the Minister enlighten the Assembly to the view of the Planning Department in relation to sensitive coastal sites, particularly in view of the demonstration last weekend, whereby there is a building on a site; will the department be looking for a significant reduction in the footprint to gain environmental gain?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The Planning Department considers the preservation of the coastal zone and the countryside of the utmost importance. The general principles that have been established in relation to the conversion or the demolition of existing commercial sites and their replacement with residential in the coastal areas, is that there has been an expectation of a reduction. However, there are one or 2 cases of which I am aware where residential units on the coastal zone have been replaced with new residential units that are significantly larger. So all I can say is over a period of time this must be considered on a case by case basis. But I think it is very clear that presently the move is towards restricting development in the coastal zone and being more careful with what development is allowed and the standard of that development and I am sure that the Island Plan when it concludes through the consultation process will reflect that public mood.

5.9 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

An application to build homes on field 1248 at La Pouquelaye was referred to the Minister from the Planning Applications Panel a few weeks ago. Is the Minister able to indicate when he might be making a decision on that application, please?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am waiting on some advice from officers presently and I will announce my decision very shortly.

5.10 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Bearing in mind last week's decision regarding the Plémont headland and the old holiday village, will the Minister assure the House that he will be looking to liaise with people rather than just coming in with the ministerial decision over the top of this?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am very sorry. I do not really understand what the Deputy is getting at? Perhaps she could explain a little bit more clearly.

Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

It was intimated last week that although this decision was turned down for building, the Minister could override that decision and go ahead with the plans that have been put in.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I think that it is most unlikely that that would occur.

5.11 Deputy J.A. Martin:

It is just to go back. I want a reassurance. I have full faith in this Minister for Planning and Environment who says that of the already rezoned sites if there is very much deviation from what we agreed in this House it would come back. I am concerned that in 2 years' time Senator Cohen may not be the Minister for Planning and Environment. Is there any way we can get an assurance that if these sites are not developed in the next 2 years everything will have to come back to this House?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am not sure that that assurance can be given, but I would be deeply disappointed if all the sites had not progressed through to the point of planning consent within 2 years. It does, so far, seem to be an extraordinarily slow process, but I am afraid that that is often the case when a development and commercial interest are involved.

5.12 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Does the Minister not agree that this apparent policy of we will build on the coastline as long as the building is beautiful, is contrary to what the public want and will he not take direction from the public and say that building on the coastline is in principle not desired?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

My general view is, and of course there always will be exceptions, that there should not be new building on the coastline where there are presently are no buildings. However, if someone makes an application in relation to an existing building the Minister for Planning and Environment and the Planning Department cannot take away their property interest and the property owner is entitled to make a planning application for really whatever they want. It is up to the Planning Department to ensure that we represent effectively in the long term the collective view of Islanders. That is what I am endeavouring to do. If we are going to allow building on the coastline then let us make it exceptional and let us make sure that we ensure that it is delivered to the highest standard.

5.13 The Deputy of St. John:

Will the Minister confirm or otherwise if he would be happy for the Environment Scrutiny Panel to review the final draft of the Island Plan when it is ready?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am delighted for Scrutiny to take whatever course of action it wishes in relation to the Island Plan, and I will endeavour to assist them in every way possible.

The Bailiff:

Very well, that concludes the time for questions to the Minister.

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

Sir, perhaps in answer to a question earlier I said that I was not an avid browser of the internet. It would appear that the questioner themselves is neither because both the documents that were referred to as not being publicly available on the website are in fact publicly available on my department's website and on the government.je website.