

2.8 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding grants to the Cultural sector:

Given the emergency grant to the Jersey Heritage Trust, will the Minister be responding similarly to requests from the cultural sector?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

I am pleased that the Deputy has acknowledged that a number of our cultural organisations are facing serious funding pressures. I raised this with his panel during our first Scrutiny public meeting and also referred to this matter in response to a question which the Deputy asked in January. As the Minister responsible for the cultural sector, I will do all in my power to continue to provide financial support to all organisations tasked with delivering services in this area and work with those organisations to ensure that the best possible value is achieved for that support. In the case of Jersey Heritage Trust, the problem was an immediate one which would have resulted in the closure of at least one and possibly 2 of our heritage sites. In my view, this would have been unacceptable, hence my response. This does not, however, diminish the extent of the challenges elsewhere. There are more fundamental issues to address which is whether funding for the cultural sector is sufficient to ensure a sustainable approach to managing and protecting our heritage, while at the same time developing the wealth of creativity which exists in our Island. I shall work with all those involved in the coming months to consider this issue and will value the opportunity to involve the Deputy and indeed his panel in that process.

2.8.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister confirm that, notwithstanding the excellent work, I should add, of the Heritage Trust, one of the issues which had led to the current crisis, namely the amphibious vehicle issue, he was convinced that all the lessons that needed to be learnt had been learnt and there would be no further quackery about the DUKWs (amphibious trucks)? [Laughter] Secondly, why did he choose ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Sorry, one question at a time, Deputy.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I believe for the most part the issues to do with Jersey Heritage do not directly relate to the issue of the DUKWs. It is indeed more of an issue of reduced income derived from lack of visitors attending on the sites.

2.8.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister just stated that he would do his utmost to support culture in the Island. Will he be approaching the Treasury and Resources Minister to access some of the stabilisation fund in these recessionary times so that he can physically support culture in the Island? If he has not approached the Minister for Treasury and Resources, will he do so in the immediate future?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am pleased that the Deputy raised this issue. I have indeed raised this matter with the Minister for Treasury and Resources, especially with regard to the short-term issues and dialogue continues.

2.8.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister have any optimism that he will achieve the results with the Minister for Treasury and Resources who, so far, has not let out what he is going to do with this £140 million?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am classed as the eternal optimistic.

2.8.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

We know, from past information, that the cable cars were a dramatic effect on the downturn of footfall in relation to Fort Regent. We also know that when the Jersey Heritage Trust took over Elizabeth Castle, for example, they were having something like 300,000 or 400,000 a year visiting the castle and now it is down to 100,000. Would the Minister look into these important issues of accessibility and also affordability? In other areas and in other jurisdictions in the world, local residents visit sites because they are given reductions due to their residency to visit local attractions and local sites of important cultural heritage. Will the Minister look at these important issues to drive up numbers of people visiting these locations?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am working with and encouraging Jersey Heritage Trust to look at all options and ways in which to improve their income and secure future for not only Elizabeth Castle but other heritage sites.

2.8.5 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Would the Minister agree with me that, quite apart from the cultural benefits to the community from investing in our heritage and our culture, there is a clear economic payback from these investments, especially in relation to our tourism industry, as was recently illustrated by the representative from Isle of Man Heritage?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Absolutely. I believe we have a lot to learn from the experiences in the Isle of Man and I, for one, will be pursuing that particular line.

2.8.6 The Deputy of St. John:

Would the Minister explain why he needs to go to the Treasury for additional funding, given that several weeks ago, I raised questions about Victoria College being lit from dusk until dawn? This morning I noticed it was still lit and if he was to be turning off the lights at a reasonable hour at night, I am sure funding could be found from within his budget. Will he please answer that question?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The Education Department provides independent and separate budgets to each school that the schools are responsible to manage. Therefore, I am unable to directly influence that particular area. I have already passed on the concerns regarding the lighting of Victoria College to the headmaster and the school and I believe that they are looking at it.

2.8.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

What consideration has the Minister given to restoring provision for access from the town side to Fort Regent in order to revive what is his responsibility; a Sports and Cultural Centre in Fort Regent?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am aware that various studies have been undertaken, the latest by a group called EDAW which, for the life of me, I cannot remember what it stands for, so will you please forgive me if I do not use the actual wording. However, one of the issues is the access to Fort Regent from the Snow Hill area. This is very much, I believe, key to the future development of the site and it is an area that I wish to see promoted.

2.8.8 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Would the Minister inform the House whether there has, since he became Minister, been any investigation as to whether Culture is under the right Ministry? I said this when I stood for the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture after speaking to the Minister for Economic Development: "Culture will die at Education unless it is moved to Economic Development." Has the Minister investigated this or is he just willing to let it die while he is empire building?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I refute the suggestion that I am empire building. I do believe that there are opportunities that exist to further develop culture and look at the synergies between culture and tourism. However, let us not forget that culture is not just about money or economic development or tourism. It is about recognising our local heritage and developing it. Thank you.

2.8.9 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister not accept that these grants need to be fully tied down to specific purposes and that he also needs - if he is truly serious - to find money to deal with fundamental issues like the loan at the Opera House which remains a constant drag on that organisation and the fundamental issue of the fact that the Heritage Trust is simply going to go bankrupt if tourist revenue does not increase?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do believe that the Opera House needs to be addressed and that is one of the many matters that are on my agenda. Equally, regarding the grants and the funding, partnership agreements were put in place last year with all funded cultural organisations. I am in the process of re-visiting these partnership arrangements to understand how they are managed. Thank you.