

2.14 The Deputy of St. Mary of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding proposals within the North of Town Masterplan team to build housing on the Gas Place end of the Millennium Town Park site:

Will the Minister advise whether one proposal being considered by the North of Town Masterplan team is to build housing on the Gas Place end of the Millennium Town Park site and if so does he consider this to be a betrayal of all those who signed the petition for the park's creation?

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

The brief for the North of Town Masterplan allows the consultants not only to produce a plan which accommodates the town park as originally proposed, but also to look at other visions for the area. One of the key objectives of the town park decision was the provision of underground car parking. This will be unaffordable without some development on the edges of the park. Therefore the masterplanners will likely present a range of options and one of those is likely to include the concept of building some housing around the edge of the park. The draft Masterplan will shortly be presented to the Political Steering Group, thereafter a decision will be made on which options are favoured and a presentation will be made to States Members.

2.14.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

If I may, a supplementary? With respect, the issue is not really about the car parking. The problem is that if we protect the quality of life of one group - that is those who live in the countryside - and we fail to enhance the quality of life of another group - those who live in town - then I think we are engaging almost in social apartheid and I would ask the Minister does he not agree that the park should be the size that everybody who signed that petition thought it was going to be and not reduced for matters of expediency? It appears that people matter less than money.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

That is far from the case. The objective of the North of Town Masterplan is to deliver the best solution for the north of the town and the best solution for the Island. If the Political Steering Group decide that the preferred option is to consider some development on the site, it would only be on the basis that that improves the whole ... the holistic whole is improved. It certainly is not simply just a matter of money.

2.14.2 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Would the Minister confirm that the terms of the petition which I presented in 1999 make it clear that no building will take place on the site and therefore any decision to pursue that would require the States to rescind its approval of the petition?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The petition which I have in front of me is a little bit confusing, but I do accept that the principle was that the town park should be unencumbered. If the decision of the Political Steering Group was that we favoured some building, then of course the matter would be brought back to the States.

2.14.3 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Does the Minister share my disappointment that Members are already devaluing the work of the masterplanners before the plan has even been presented?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I think that many Members have a particular interest in the town park and that interest has been held for many years. I do understand that they are concerned when they hear rumours of various different proposals but I would make the point that the Masterplan, as I said earlier, will present a range of options and from that range of options the Political Steering Group will bring forward some recommendations.

2.14.4 Senator S. Syvret:

Does the Minister not accept that the Masterplanners, however marvellous they may be, are the tail attempting to wag the dog here? There is an extant States decision that this park will be created and it will be unencumbered across its surface. Does the Minister not also accept that that part of town is the most densely populated and poorest and neglected part of Jersey and it is quite absurd to start ruining what would be a wonderful green lung for that part of town by building on it?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

That is the whole point. The objective is to present the very best for the north of the town and the very best for the Island as a whole. If the argument put forward is that the park will be better with some development around it then that would be the preferred route possibly of the Political Steering Group. It is a question of whether Members believe that unencumbered space that bleeds into the surrounding area is the absolute imperative or whether Members believe that delivering proper traffic and parking solution to the north of the town is also exceptionally important. If we are to do that it is very clear that underground car parking is far preferable to above ground car parking and therefore some mechanism to deliver underground car parking on the Town Park site will need to be found.

2.14.5 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

The Minister has given 2 reasons for the possibility of building on the park; one that it would improve the aesthetics and the other that it is required for paying for the parking. Would he confirm that all previous discussions on the town park going back now for more than a decade, have assumed that the Car Park Trading Fund will bear the cost of the parking that is going to be provided?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I think, as many Members may know, the Car Park Trading Fund is unlikely to be able to afford the cost of underground car parking which could be up to double the cost per space of producing above ground car parking.

2.14.6 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Yes, in remembering that the context of having this park is now that we are going to put 7,700 more people into the town area, how does the Minister think that it can possibly be the best solution for the park to consider building yet more housing instead of having the green lung that we only on this site can have for that part of town?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

No one is suggesting there would be no green lung. All that is being considered is the various options relating to how that green lung is delivered and how it is framed. Reverting to the point made by Senator Perchard, I think it would be helpful if Members were prepared to give a little time and wait until they see the Masterplan and then I am sure there will be plenty of opportunity to criticise.