

6. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Minister for Planning and Environment

6.1 The Deputy of St. John:

In the new North of Town Masterplan that was put out to Members yesterday and in the public domain, I note that Ann Court and the Town Park block houses look more like Wormwood Scrubs and Parkhurst. Will, when the time comes, the Minister look at replacing buildings similar to those in David Place if any buildings are going to go on Ann Court?

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

I am sorry to hear that the Deputy has spent so much time looking at Wormwood Scrubs. The intention was certainly not to emulate Wormwood Scrubs in any way at all. The principle is classical architecture. We have simply shown blocks. We had this problem with the Esplanade Quarter scheme that Members thought that we were showing completed buildings in our proposals. These are Masterplan proposals and the buildings contained therein are simply block illustrations. There is no architecture and no design there yet.

6.1.1 The Deputy of St. John:

Will the Minister look at replacing or replicating the buildings similar to those in David Place within the Ann Street development?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Sorry, I missed that part of the Deputy's question. Yes, most certainly. The principle is classical architecture but we are yet to design the building, so yes they will emulate those in David Place and in other areas where classical architecture abounds.

6.2 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Members may recall that I have raised questions in the House before over the non-completion of the estate up at Le Clos Vaze, the question I wanted to ask the Minister was ... I am delighted to report that the play space is now operational despite being told that it would be finished last November. It is operational, there are still matters outstanding with regard to the completion of the estate almost 3 years after it has been occupied by the residents. What lessons, if any, has the Minister learnt from this episode?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The lessons I have learnt are that it is extremely difficult to ensure that conditions on planning applications are implemented within the timescale the Planning Department would like if the developer is keen to avoid implementing those conditions. We have a small enforcement team comprising 2 officers. If we tried to implement immediately every planning condition they would be working day and night, 365 days a year. Our resources are limited. We do our best and we rely on the good faith of applicants to comply with conditions. Applicants usually are very keen to comply with conditions before they get their consent and become a little more reluctant once they have got the consent, but we do our best.

6.2.1 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Would it not be possible for the Minister to take action against those individuals, and I think he has just said that in the main the majority of applicants do try and carry out conditions imposed upon them, would it not be possible to isolate those applicants who are failing to do so and take some positive action against them?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

We sometimes do and the process is, I am afraid, long and complex and one is better off to try and encourage the applicant to comply with the conditions of the consent. But in the extreme, yes we will take action.

6.3 The Connétable of St. Clement:

In view of the Minister's often repeated promise not to bring forward proposal for rezoning any major sites for housing without the support of the relevant Connétables, what will the Minister be doing about the proposed sites and the draft Island Plan which meet this criteria? In other words, which do not have the support of the relevant Connétables.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

To repeat, I gave a very clear undertaking to the Connétables on more than one occasion that I would not bring forward developments within their Parishes that did not have their support. The sites within the Island Plan consultation were those that were considered by the department to be best in planning terms; however if they do not have the support of the Connétable I will clearly be recommending to the Inspector that they are not proceeded with.

6.3.1 The Connétable of St. Clement:

I was encouraged by that answer until the very last moment, the Senator will be recommending to the Inspector they not be proceeded with. Is the draft plan in the ownership of the Minister or is it in the ownership of the Inspector and does the Minister not have the authority to bring forward the draft Island Plan as he would wish to see it or is it going to be as the Inspector would wish to see it?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Ultimately it is the Minister's plan but the next stage is that the Inspector will examine the plan and part of the examination will be my submission to the Inspector that the sites that do not have the Connétable's support should not be proceeded with. We will have to see what the Inspector comes back with at the end of his period of examination.

6.4 Senator J.L. Perchard:

The new North of Town Masterplan on page 16 marks in bright red as landmark buildings the magnificent St. Thomas' Church, the charming structures of the central market and fish market, the wonderful examples of opulent architecture of the Masonic Temple, the imposing dominant Victoria College, and some other smaller buildings. I note also that the large gas cylinder at the foot of St. Saviour's Hill is marked in the same colours and therefore put in the same category, as is the concrete mass of the old Odeon Cinema. Can the Minister advise the House if this is a mistake or is it me that has gone mad?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I can confirm that it is the Senator that has gone mad. **[Laughter]** The gasometer is marked in red simply because it is a large building. It is a landmark and is identified as a landmark building. There is certainly no intention of listing it, no intention of preserving it and I certainly hope it will be removed as soon as possible.

Senator J.L. Perchard:

For the second part of my question?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I was hoping to avoid further discussion on to the Odeon Cinema. The Odeon Cinema is one of those buildings that has very different views from different groups of people. Some are desperately enthused by it. Some think it is frankly awful. What will happen is that when plans come forward we will need to balance very carefully the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining or demolishing the building but at the present the building is listed and therefore we have to take into account the fact that the building is listed and that for some people it has great architectural importance.

[12:15]

6.5 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Learning from my Senatorial colleagues I thought I might use a few sound bites, so could I ask the Minister, does he not concede that the proposed flats on the Town Millennium Park are not a Masterplan, it is a disaster plan. In fact it is not a plan, it is cram. Will he not listen to 17,000 people and withdraw his support for this appalling idea and give us a park and just a park and nothing but a park?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I regret the language used by the Deputy but I clearly see that he is passionate about the issue. We have presented an holistic masterplan; it is a masterplan that involves significant regeneration of the north of the town through a number of mechanisms. The proposed development of social housing or apartments or flats on a small part of the east end of the park is one of the key elements of the plan. It should be debated by the House. It is not a matter for me to decide and the democratic process is that the House should be able to decide whether or not they wish to support the plan or certain elements of the plan.

6.6 Connétable D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:

I would like to take the Minister back to the imposition of conditions on planning consents and remind him that the La Providence development had 60-plus conditions imposed and I wonder why conditions are imposed by the Minister when he has acknowledged here that often they will not be implemented as they should be?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

In relation to La Providence, we were particularly careful to control the development through the use of numerous conditions. Many of those conditions have been revised or discharged during the period of the development. I do not think that any of the conditions have been revised to the detriment of the scheme and I am assured that those conditions that remain will be discharged before the scheme is completed.

6.6.1 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

To go back to the Minister's mention of having only 2 enforcement officers within his department, in the past couple of weeks I have had to contact those enforcement officers on a considerable number of matters that have been raised with me by parishioners. Is the Minister satisfied that his department is being run as effectively as possible by the fact that he has only 2 enforcement officers when we know that there are a great deal of problems surrounding conditions and questions of planning applications?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The department is being run exceedingly well by an exceedingly competent Chief Officer. However, the Chief Officer has to operate within very difficult financial constraints. Very clearly 2 enforcement officers are insufficient, we are doing our best with the 2 officers we have. They are under considerable strain and they have to prioritise their enforcement work. We could do with more but I am afraid there is no money, neither is there likely to be any further money.

6.7 Deputy J.A. Martin:

It is quite short notice but I am referring to the aerial shot of the North of Town Masterplan, and I am wondering if the Minister for Planning and Environment can provide aerial shots of the other 11 Parishes for comparison for a later debate?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

If Members wish me to provide aerial shots of the other Parishes and the rest of St. Helier, I would be more than happy to provide them, but I think Members know what they will show.

6.7.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Is the Minister for Planning and Environment confirming where the grey spots on this plan would be green and the green would be grey in all the other Parishes?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

There is a difference between an urban Parish and a country Parish. **[Laughter]** One will be predominantly green and one will be predominantly grey, and long may it be so.

6.8 Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I would like to take the Minister back to landmark buildings and we have got a new landmark building that probably fits - if not worse - in the gasometer, and that is the new incinerator, which I gather was going to be sympathetically landscaped and I wondered if the Minister could tell me how he now intends to ensure that that monster is sympathetically landscaped?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The language the Deputy chooses to use precludes any further consideration of the architectural success of the building when it is complete, and I would urge him to reserve his judgment until the building is complete. There is still cladding to go on the building. There is still a huge landscaping proposal which will mask some of the building, but I have made no secret of the fact that the building is frankly enormous and it has a significant impact and always will have an impact, whether it is an architectural success we will be unable to gauge until it is completed and we see the reaction to it.

6.8.1 Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Is the Minister telling me that the cladding will diminish the size of the building? Is it invisible cladding or disappearing cladding?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The Deputy knows perfectly well that is not what I am saying. What I am saying, to be more specific, is that the cladding will mask the contents of the building. The building will be huge, it will always look huge and there is nothing I or anyone else can do about the size of the building.

6.9 The Deputy of St. Mary:

The States have formally approved the building of a park across the entire land and they voted for that, and they voted for the compulsory purchase of the Talman site. There have been numerous statements of support for the building of the park across the entire land by P. and R. (Policy and Resources) and in Strategic Plans. Can the Minister explain on what authority he has reversed the policy of this House and the stated wishes of the population?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The Deputy chooses the bits of the States proposition that suit him. The reality is that we approved the use of the area for a town park and the creation of a car park. The Deputy wishes to produce a park but does not wish to produce a car park. The job of the Minister for Planning and Environment and the Planning Department is to deliver masterplans - or part of our job is to deliver masterplans. The authority is within the States because I have lodged the masterplan for endorsement by the States. I am not claiming authority to implement the masterplan. I am asking the States whether they wish to endorse it. If they do not wish to endorse it, I will not be implementing the masterplan, therefore it is the States decision.

6.9.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

The question was, with respect, on what authority the Minister has single-handedly reversed the votes of this House for a park across the entire site by bringing forward a masterplan which has one-sixth of the land covered in plants?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I think I have already answered the question. But to repeat, I have not gone back on anything the House decided. I have lodged a masterplan. The masterplan is for the House to debate and we will see whether the House wishes to endorse this masterplan or not. The Deputy no doubt will have his chance to make a long contribution to that debate at an appropriate time.

The Bailiff:

Very well, that brings questions to the Minister for Planning and Environment to an end. We then come to personal statements and leave has been given to Deputy Tadier to make a personal statement, although he is not here. He has now come in. **[Aside] [Laughter]**