

4.3 Deputy F.J. Hill of St. Martin of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding scaffolding around St. James' Church:

Given that in July 2008 the scaffolding which was erected around St. James' Church, which was erected in September 2006, cost £15,500 a year alone, would the Minister advise how much the hiring of the scaffolding has cost to date, why it is still there and when will it be removed?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):

Deputy Le Fondré, responsible for property matters, will answer this question.

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré of St. Lawrence (Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources - rapporteur):

The hire charges for the scaffolding were approximately £15,500 in 2007, £15,500 in 2008, £15,700 in 2009, and estimated to be approximately £17,000 for 2010. What I would say is that the scaffolding remains *in situ* to protect the public from the risk of loose masonry falling from the towers, and the cost of making safe the towers and façade is estimated at between £500,000 and £750,000. Therefore the sheer cost of remedying the problem hugely outweighs the short term revenue cost of keeping the scaffolding in place. This is one of the dilemmas we are persistently having in property. Jersey Property Holdings has been required to prioritise this expenditure on building maintenance to essential health and safety compliance works, and is therefore not in a position to direct the necessary funding to repair the towers in St. James at this time. Unfortunately, to answer the last part of the question, at present there is no firm plan to remove the scaffolding.

4.3.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I did ask very much the same question 2 years ago, in fact on 2nd July, and I understand that the answer given last time was around £300,000 to put the matter right. Is the Assistant Minister able to inform Members why the large increase in the work? Is it because it is deteriorating faster than one would have thought, therefore the sooner it was done? Would it not be better to have the job done sooner, rather than wait, because it will go up a lot more? Why has it gone up so much?

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I would have to go back and just check my previous response in terms of exactly the composition of the £300,000. What I do know is that there are 2 aspects to the work.

[10:00]

One of the actual pinnacles on the top of St. James, which are subject to very stringent planning conditions, and for example, one application which was made in November 2006 was just simply to remove them, which would have been at a cost of approximately £88,000. However, that is not acceptable, given that the building is an S.S.I. (Site of Special Interest). The further piece of work, as I understand it, is there is a degree of remedial work that is required to the actual front of the building as well. So it is not just the pinnacles, it is also the facade of the building that requires attention. Essentially, given that the other priorities that exist in the estate, and given the maintenance budget, of which I think Members are already aware of the position that the property portfolio is in, there are far greater priorities than this particular project. That is the dilemma we face.

4.3.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Just a follow up, really. Again, 2 years ago, the Minister answered last time, but gave an assurance to the House that they were having a meeting with the Minister for Planning to ensure that there was a solution, because it would be hoped that the work would be carried out before election time, but the Minister at the time did not say what election. Was there any possibility of the 2 departments - Property Holdings and Planning - getting together to see what can be done to get this work completed? It was promised it would be done before the election last time, can we have an assurance of when there will be a report between Property Holdings and Planning to get a resolution to this problem?

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

We are certainly in dialogue with Planning on a variety of matters on many occasions, so I shall ensure this is raised again with them. My last understanding on the matter, which was a few months ago, was that discussions had been had with Planning, no solution had been found to meet the S.S.I. conditions. We are all working together; I think we fully accept the position in the Planning Department on the matter. However, even if we can come to an acceptable solution from the planning perspective, it does come down to the priority of the other statutory maintenance that we must perform on the portfolio to keep it safe, and that is our utmost concern, and has to remain that way.

4.3.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Following on from the last question, really, I accept what the Assistant Minister says about priorities, but does he not also concede that this is the type of response that drives the public mad? Ultimately, if this continues, we will arrive at having spent more than £500,000 and still having a building wrapped in scaffolding. It makes no sense, certainly not to me, or most of the people I speak to. That was the question: does he agree it is a false economy?

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I think it is slightly more complicated than that. One has to look at, effectively, the revenue equivalent for spending £500,000 now, and the revenue equivalent of that, if you look at a return on £500,000 now, is fairly low. Equally, for example, I signed off a decision yesterday to approve the plans to replace a leaking roof on a school building, and that is the question: which is the greater priority? Our view is that keeping children dry and in an acceptable work condition was more important, given the financial constraints we have. That is the dilemma we face.

4.3.4 The Deputy of St. John:

Once again our infrastructure is falling about around our ears. Last week, the centre was closed for the election on safety reasons. If that is the case, can the Minister tell Members whether or not the centre is to remain closed to people for its current purpose, education and the like? If so, does he believe that is a good use of that property?

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

My understanding, from a Property Holdings perspective, but also the media comments on and around the election time, was that the reason St. James was not used as a polling booth was purely from the fact that there was an accident, at least, either one or 2 individuals slipped on a step in St. James at the previous elections. Given the

constraints we operate under, because it is an S.S.I., measures were taken to make sure that step was far more visible, basically by putting a yellow, bright visibility strip on that step to remedy the situation. The Chairman of the Jersey Arts Centre was on record as saying that building is remaining open. They have absolutely no health and safety concerns about the operation of that matter. I think the particular instance was a one-off set of events, which further measures have been taken to remedy.

4.3.5 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Does the Assistant Minister not think it is a touch ironic that there is no interest in this building, no real interest in this building, and it happens to be a site of special interest? Property Holdings bat it off annually, and the Minister for Planning maintains that it is a building of special interest. Yet it is under-used and falling down. Does the Minister agree with me that it is time for the heritage group, the heritage lobby, and the Minister for Planning in particular, to get real about the numbers of churches and old chapels around the Island that are falling down, yet have this burden of a site of special interest over it, and it is now time to take tough decisions that protect the best and moves on, and allows St. Helier to move on, and demolish the worst, and to get real? Will the Minister be putting pressure on his colleague at Planning to do something about the site of special interest label on St. James?

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

To an extent, I probably disagree with the Member. Firstly, I confess frustration, because we are all in this position of seeing a building that is not in the state that was originally envisaged in, I think, the 1990s, when the States originally purchased it. In fact, if I recall correctly, the phase 2 or 3 of the work that was originally envisaged was never performed by the States of the day. What I will say is that we are doing ... we have a number of reviews undergoing at the moment, and one of them is in conjunction with the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture, and that does include St. James. So we are not just sitting there, we are trying to establish a long term plan, or even a medium term plan, for that particular site. Is the building worthy of an S.S.I.? Yes, in my view - although I am not the Minister for Planning, obviously - I think it is. If you look at the photographs, especially when you can see the building at its full, which is not easy from street level, it is worthy of being an S.S.I. But that is the constraints that we operate under in the planning process, and certainly I have seen other schemes that the Minister for Planning, I believe, has approved, which have shown very useful alternative uses for such buildings. Therefore I think it is something that in the medium term we can resolve, but we are in this short term dilemma - it has been longer than we would prefer - of having to manage the capital cost of remedying it versus the short term revenue cost of keeping it safe.

4.3.6 Senator J.L. Perchard:

A supplementary question arising from that answer. Very briefly, it is a great relief to me that there is to be a review being undertaken by Property Holdings and Education, Sport and Culture. Will the Assistant Minister tell us the terms of reference for this review?

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I do not have them to hand, but I will ensure that the Member is informed in due course.

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

Firstly, can I raise défaut on the Deputy of St. Mary?

The Deputy Bailiff:

It is proposed the défaut on the Deputy of St. Mary be raised. The défaut is raised.

4.3.7 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I thought Senator Perchard has possibly asked my question, except he had to put in: “And let us demolish these sites, especially in St. Helier, and let them get on with the rest of it.” I can assure you there is a lot all over the Island, and this is my question to the Assistant Minister for Property Holdings: when are they going to get real and really prioritise? This building - and my electors want to know - which is the site of special interest, the old church or the scaffolding? **[Laughter]** They really cannot work it out any more. **[Approbation]** The answer to the question was totally wrong about one person slipping. We have stood on that door for 4 elections now. People fall in and they fall out, and none of them are intoxicated. It is dangerous, and a red line or a yellow line is not going to help people. It is not even good enough for a polling station. The question is, when will they get real? Really, they know they will not have the money, at least in the next 20 years. The only thing left will be the scaffolding, and will he get real and agree with us?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Assistant Minister, when are you going to get real? **[Laughter]**

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Unfortunately, in Property Holdings, reality hits us every day, and that is the reality on the state of the property portfolio as a whole, and that is the position about priorities. As I said, even yesterday, the priority was, do we fix a leaking school roof and continue having scaffolding there, or do we let the school roof leak and restore a cultural building? That is the priorities there, and our decision as of yesterday, and it continues to be the case, was the biggest priority for us.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am afraid there are still Members wishing to ask questions, but time is passing and we need to go on to the next question.