

4. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Minister for Transport and Technical Services

The Deputy Bailiff:

We now come to questions without notice. The first question is for the Minister for Transport and Technical Services and it starts now. I call on the Deputy of St. John.

4.1 The Deputy of St. John:

Yes, Sir, but I will not be allowed to put a question that I want to put in this particular session if I follow **[Interruption]** ... So, I am going to move along, Sir. Given that under the Business Plan some £9 million is being spoken of for the infrastructure for the forthcoming year, of that £9 million how much is to be spent, please, on main drains extensions and repairs?

The Connétable of St. Brelade (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

Effectively we have over £1 billion of infrastructure assets in the Island to look after and quite candidly the funding we have for them is insufficient. We do not have a budget for new drains at this present moment but we clearly look after the failing assets as and when we can and try to prioritise, particularly where failures occur and things have to be dealt with earlier than necessary.

4.1.1 The Deputy of St. John:

Can the Minister confirm that he is fighting his corner when it comes to doing what is right for the infrastructure given he is Minister for one of the most important ministries in the Island, and much of the infrastructure is not seen and £9 million is a spot in the ocean. It does not appear to me that he is fighting his corner. Please justify that he has fought it.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

While it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the amount of funding the department receives from the Minister for Treasury and Resources I can assure the Deputy that my officers and myself are most vociferous when it comes to bidding for the necessary funding, and I hope that will be demonstrated in the achievement of the sinking of the last stages of the Cavern drainage project and the Phillips Street shaft which should take place shortly.

4.2 The Deputy of St. Mary:

My question is about the La Collette ash mountain, as it is called by some, and it looks as if again, to some people, that the study was in a sense aimed to get one answer. Can the Minister confirm that the study was genuinely open-ended as to what to do with the 2 different kind of ash from the incinerator? That it was genuinely open-ended, looked at all the possibilities with full analysis and can the Minister tell Members whether the analysis was scoped with local stakeholders such as Health Protection, the Ramsar Management Authority and so on?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I can probably not answer in entirety on this because I have only just had the report, but in practice my understanding is that the options are very broad and effectively just looking at the first part there are almost 4 options for looking at different ways of dealing with the bottom ash and 3 on fly ash. In terms of relationships with the Ramsar Group the Deputy will be aware that they have consulted and there has been no liaison with that body. In terms of Health Protection I cannot say because I have not reached that bit yet but no doubt I would be concerned if there was not to be collusion with those other bodies.

4.3 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

While I appreciate Members will say: "Well, she would say that, wouldn't she?" I am delighted to see that the Minister's department is advertising for apprenticeships in a number of different

categories, so can the Minister please advise Members on how this is to proceed and will this be an ongoing annual intake?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I cannot find the bit of paper this refers to, but in practice I personally have been very keen to encourage further apprenticeships within my department as I would do throughout the States. I think it is incumbent on the States as a good employer to do this. Clearly the Island has a skill shortage, there is no question about it, and it is absolutely essential that if we are to diversify away from the finance industry we do skill up those who have the benefit of skills in manual trades, if you like, so that we can reap the benefit of their future efforts as years go by.

4.4 Connétable J. Gallichan of St. Mary:

Bearing in mind in his answer to my written question 8 today the Minister admitted that a vehicle of 2.1 metres in length can be accommodated within the safety island outside the Bel Royal lay-by; does the Minister really consider this is adequate when a small car, a Mini, is 2.7 metres, a Fiesta is 3.9 metres, to have almost half the length of a car protruding into a lane of traffic? Is the Minister satisfied with this?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

While the junction has its shortcomings at Bel Royal, I think in practice the fact that vehicles do transit diagonally in fact reduces the problem as indicated by the Connétable. Nothing in life is perfect and this was a compromise achieved by the designers when it was done 3 years ago, perhaps 4 now, and the effect was that an entrance was created into the Bel Royal car park and a separate exit whereas there was one before. So, this is a compromise we have had to put up with, but in practice it seems to work and reports are that it is functional and we have not had an issue with it.

4.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The Minister for Treasury and Resources has stated that the maintenance staff from J.P.H. will be moved to T.T.S. Is the Minister aware of this and is he aware that the maintenance staff at J.P.H. manage maintenance and that most of the work is undertaken by outside contractors and does he consider whether this change is appropriate?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

While I am aware from earlier discussions in the Assembly today that discussions are afoot I have not myself been involved at this stage. However, I would say there is an enormous amount of commonality between what my department do and what Property Holdings are doing and in terms of the general public it is enormously confusing to have these different administrations looking after similar States assets, and the sooner we can collude and join this thing together so that better value is given to the public, in my view, the better.

4.5.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The Minister has not answered my question. Most of the maintenance work undertaken by J.P.H. is by outside contractors. Is this change therefore appropriate?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I must say I am not aware of the Jersey Property Holdings arrangements at present but I think that the ways in which outside contracting is handled could be viewed by my department. I would say that my department has extremely good staff who are probably quite capable of doing it all and we would have to have discussions as to how to give the public the best benefit.

4.6 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

As per a media release released by Transport and Technical Services over a month ago, which identified plans for resurfacing works up until 2017, could the Minister advise whether the guarantees given by contractors carrying out these works will be reviewed?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The programme of resurfacing obviously is constrained by the budget and the programme has been put forward for this year, but in terms of guarantees there are normal contractual guarantees with all works undertaken or contracted out by my department and the guarantees are pressed and the contractors undertake any faults issues which happen to occur.

4.6.1 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Can the Minister confirm whether they are regularly reviewed then, or whether it is a standard guarantee given to all contractors?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The contracts are based on national contracts and they are reviewed as and when necessary but in practice there has not been a need for a review that I am aware of. Having said that, if there are any structural issues, particularly with regard to road surfacing, that we are not satisfied with they will be attended to. This has been the case on certain works on Victoria Avenue.

4.7 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Given the Energy from Waste plant is providing electricity to the Island from waste will the Minister agree to put on to the website of the States of Jersey the amount of electricity produced each month and the defrayed costs from purchasing?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

While I cannot answer directly because I am not aware of the technical ability to do that, the plant is not producing the electricity fully. The whole plant is undergoing the testing phase at present and we are looking forward to receiving the results of that testing. So, that is certainly an area I am happy to investigate and advise the Deputy in due course.

4.8 The Connétable of St. Mary:

Following on from the Deputy of St. John's question about the high-friction surfaces on Victoria Avenue, driving through the First Tower junction today there was an incredible amount of loose material on the junction on the side of the slip road. Is the Minister satisfied that this does not pose a danger to motorcyclists, quite apart from producing a better surface?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

In practice after any resurfacing there is a degree of residue which has to be cleaned up and no doubt that will be swept up once the contractors finish. Members may or may not be aware that the previous surface prior to reconstruction had a similar sort of surfacing on it but in time the colour gets absorbed into the grey colour of the existing asphalt.

4.9 Deputy S. Power:

Can the Minister confirm whether the E.f.W. (Electricity from Waste) plant has been able to run continuously for 14 days in test mode?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Presently it is in that period. It was shut down a couple of weeks ago for examination of the grates and so on. A significant amount of waste was piled up in the bunkers and it is now in the middle of this test mode, so we are looking forward to the reports from that and hope all will be well so that we can progress towards the handover and taking on full responsibility for the plant.

4.10 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Following on from that question, can the Minister tell the House what happens if the plant is handed over and then something is found not to be working satisfactorily?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Initially there is a 3-month period during which the staff of the builder stays with us. After that there is a further year guarantee period on operation of the plant and there will no doubt be contractual arrangements with regard to parts within it. So, I think it is once again within standard contractual arrangements and I would like to think that we will see most of the gremlins coming out of it during this intensive testing period.

4.11 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Is the timing of the decommissioning of the E.f.W. on target or is it behind?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I assume the Deputy refers to the old plant at Bellozanne. The plant down there will not be fully decommissioned until we are satisfied the new plant is fully operational.

4.12 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Is the Minister constructing a new weighbridge at the compost site to take into account the States decision to charge for commercial green waste and if he is what is the cost of that and why cannot the other weighbridges at that location be used instead?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I cannot answer the Deputy directly on the technicalities down there but my understanding is that the green waste charging will take place from January 2013 and I am happy to look into the costings on weighbridges.

4.13 The Deputy of St. Mary:

On the local E.f.W. is the Minister satisfied that the fly ash, which is the most dangerous component of the whole enterprise, is being handled fully correctly from the point where it comes out of the flue bags and goes into lorries and is then transported and is then dumped? Is he satisfied that that whole chain is being properly managed and who is monitoring that?

[17:00]

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The fly ash disposal is monitored by my department and I am quite satisfied with the process of doing so. The Deputy will be aware there is an injection of lime into the fly ash and it is at present going to pits and the matter of the pits is a subject of the report recently produced which I have no doubt he will be looking at shortly. I look forward to further discussions on that and the decision as to how we deal with ash in the future in the Island because I think it is important that we get it right and do not penalise future generations with problems with which we have been saddled.