

3.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding visits to listed Jersey houses to document the interiors:

Will the Minister advise whether consultants are asking permission to visit listed Jersey houses to document the interiors and, if so, who is paying and why is it necessary to employ English consultants?

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

We are in the process of revising the current inadequate listing system and replacing it with a simplified system of 4 grades. This involves re-surveying every listed building and the work is being managed by Jersey Heritage. The appointed surveyors are seeking the permission of historic buildings' owners to visit their properties to assess the appropriate grading. The purpose of this work is to allow the preservation of historic buildings to be concentrated on only the most important buildings and allowing a more flexible approach to be taken with others. Many buildings are likely to be effectively downgraded. The cost of the re-survey is being met from within my department's existing budgets and spread over 3 financial years. The process of re-surveying about 3,500 buildings in the Island is a major task and was not something that could be undertaken by Jersey Heritage Trust alone. As a result, external consultants have been engaged to undertake much of the re-survey work. They have been appointed on the basis of their specialist knowledge of historic buildings following a rigorous competitive tendering process. Two bids were received from Jersey-based partnerships. While I cannot provide the exact figures due to commercial confidentiality, I can confirm that the local tenders were well over £400,000. The successful U.K. contractor was less than half the price.

3.5.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Does the Minister not realise that this is an extremely intrusive measure, wanting to look at the inside of listed buildings not inspect the outside, particularly when so many buildings have been listed without any consent from the owner and any intimation being given to the owner before the building was listed? Does he not consider that this is intrusive?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Yes, I do, and I have been very careful to ensure that the procedures followed by the surveyors are polite and practical, and the Chairman of the Planning Applications Panel and I indeed had discussions with officers to ensure that even the finest details of their attitude towards those whose properties they visit is carefully controlled. At the end of the day, this is not intended to be a forcible process and we hope to work with property owners on the basis that most of those who own listed buildings are proud of them and are interested in experts viewing them. Bear in mind, if anyone has a particular view on a listed building and considers the current planning regime to be too intrusive and too restricted, this of course is an opportunity to have greater flexibility applied to their particular property.

3.5.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Does the Minister know how many of the owners contacted refused to allow the consultants to inspect the insides of their houses?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am afraid I do not know but I can certainly ask the department if they have those figures and, if they do so, I will ensure that the information is circulated to Members.