

4. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Planning and Environment

4.1 Deputy S.G. Luce of St. Martin:

It is now several weeks since the closure date for the submissions to the St. Martin's School consultation. Is the Minister in a position to publish the results?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

Almost. The Ministerial Decision was presented at my administrative meeting yesterday. There were one or 2 things that I need to check over the week and at the end of the week I shall be in a position to endorse the document.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Does that mean the Minister will publish the results next week?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I thought that is what I said.

4.2 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Does the Minister consider it acceptable to hold up the determination of major planning schemes without giving applicants any reason for the delay or any date for the determination?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I do not think he does consider it reasonable and if the Constable would like to enlighten me as to the offence then I will be in a position to do something about it.

4.2.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

As a supplementary, I have been passing the Minister a note every 2 weeks for the last couple of months about a particular scheme that he is well aware of, which we have not had determined or any date for determination.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

In that case I think if the Constable could pass yet another note, and perhaps put the name of the site on I will see what I can do.

4.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Obviously you always treat rumours with caution, but could the Minister shed any light on something that is widely circulating about an alleged agreement being reached between himself and Dandara in relation to areas up at Fort Regent?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

That is a new one to me. I know absolutely nothing about that.

4.4 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

The Minister wears 2 hats and he tends to be asked questions on planning, so mine is of an environmental nature. I would like to refer to the coastal strategy which was published in March 2008. One of the aims and objectives stated in there was to develop a fully representative network of marine and coastal protected areas that could include no take zones. In the same document it states that the network of protected areas will be established by 2010, so 2008, 2010. So 2 years later and with World Ocean's Day on 8th June, will the Minister tell the House when that network of marine protected areas will be established?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

One of the things that I have just recently issued a Ministerial Decision on is to agree a radical shake-up of the 13-odd extra groups that we had advising me. Some of which were working in

different directions, so to speak. So the Ramsar group and the fisheries groups have been reorganised. There is undergoing work that is at a very final stage of completion and almost ready to come to the House, whereby full responsibility for agriculture and fisheries is being asked for by the Department of Environment from Economic Development, and I am hopeful that by the setting up of these new bodies there will be more opportunities to press ahead with the serious work that has been mooted and asked for. It is definitely desirable and something that I hope to achieve within my term of office.

4.4.1 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

That is very laudable, however I do not think you answered my question. What I would like to know is has any work been undertaken by the department to strengthen and increase marine reserves by looking at closed seasons and no take zones? The Minister has told us that it will be happening. I would like to know when it will be happening and what work has been undertaken in the meantime?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

There is a whole host of work that has been undertaken by various bodies, as I indicated, in which these issues are discussed. The last meeting with one of the representatives from the Fishermen's Association discussed the issues of bass minimum size stocks and, indeed, minimum sized stocks and no take areas across most of our species that are fished for in Jersey waters. In order to bring these things into fruition laws have got to be changed and the work has to be undertaken. The work is being looked at, at the moment, by the officers and I am hoping that it will be progressed in as short a timeframe as possible.

4.5 Deputy J.H. Young:

The Minister will have heard the answer to my question to the Minister for Treasury and Resources this morning outlining that all of the H1 sites are going to be for social rented housing. Could he please tell us how he is approaching the achievement of first-time buying housing, particularly that in his written answer to me today on question 21, only 53 of the homes in progress are currently identified as first-time buyers? Can he comment on the fact that they were not zoned for first-time buy homes but lifelong homes? Is he satisfied with that? Is that enough? Can he also tell us what he is doing to return to the States with the H3 policy for first-time buy homes on privately-owned sites?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

In the statistics that were produced for the Deputy for question 21, my reading of it was that indeed in consideration of the delivery period, which was to deliver a lot of these things by the end of 2015, certainly the figures that we have produced and billed so far do not really give me much concern or worry. I think we are in a position to complete and deliver those units that we have estimated will be required. That said, I do share the Deputy's concern that perhaps not enough is being undertaken in order to bring forward truly affordable homes. Indeed, it appears that there is an undue influence at the moment that is beginning to build up to the provision of social rent plans. There needs to be a debate, I feel, in the House to determine the extent to which affordable homes should be higher up the list, so to speak. What am I doing? At the moment I am about to present a paper to the Council of Ministers for their prior endorsement before coming to this House in order to put forward a proposal to seek to increase the number of truly affordable units that could quite easily be accommodated on States-owned sites and indeed on other private sites, but under a slightly different formula to what is being considered by the Minister for Housing or indeed the Minister for Treasury and Resources. That is probably about as much as I can say on that at this point in time.

[11:45]

4.5.1 Deputy J.H. Young:

If I may, a brief supplementary? I did ask the Minister when he was going to return to the House with the H3 policy, which of course is on hold as a result of the States decision to set up a working party with the Minister, and that requires a report back to the States before it can be implemented.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Apologies, the Deputy is absolutely right. That work is ongoing and is in a final state. The timetable is to present either before the summer recess or if that is not possible, because the timetables are fairly tight, then certainly by the opening of business when we return in the autumn.

4.6 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Could the Minister tell the Assembly if there are any circumstances under which the new Island Plan allows him to make a different decision on an application depending on whether that is a States-owned site or a site in the private sector?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I think the Minister is entitled to make whatever decisions but has to pay due regard and pay attention to the Island Plan policies to the extent that those policies avail themselves or turn up in consideration of any particular proposition. At the moment, I do not think we do have one rule for States-owned sites and a different rule for members of the public. If, indeed, that is the Deputy of St. Martin's impression, then I would be grateful if he could give me indications of examples where decisions in that regard have been taken and it is certainly something that I would remedy.

4.6.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I do not have any instances in the past. I am thinking more so of the future. I would just like the Minister - if he could - to confirm that he would use the regulations on employment led as strictly in an application for a States-owned site, as he is applying it in the private sector.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Certainly, that particular clause, since its introduction in the new Island Plan has been used on many occasions so far and I would fully expect it to be considered in all applications in a fair and open way.

4.7 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Nearly a year ago the States agreed my amendment to the Island Plan that a feasibility study into a St. Helier country park should be undertaken. Could the Minister advise what progress has been made?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

This was carried in the media, I believe, last week and answers were given there, but I am happy to repeat. The work that was called for is being undertaken. There was not a specific timetable that was set down in order to deliver other than within the Island Plan period. The Constable should have my assurances however that I do consider it is an idea that merits worthy attention and perhaps is applicable in more than one place. The work is being undertaken at the moment. We can only go as fast as we can walk at the moment in terms of the number of staff that I have got to deal with master planning and S.P.G.s (Supplementary Planning Guidance) and the like. As I mentioned in this House to a previous question by the Constable of St. Helier, as to whether or not he could personally involve himself in the day-to-day and the nitty-gritty running of any detailed application, I said that I would certainly consider his offer when the time was available. We are not at that point as yet, but the Constable has my assurances that when the time comes I will be banging on his door.

4.8 Deputy J.H. Young:

On the theme of procedures for States-owned sites, he will have heard the answer from the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources this morning about the process being adopted for the Green Street site. Can he confirm that the proposal is in accordance with the Island Plan? Could he also confirm briefly that no development has yet been issued by that site, which would be the normal procedure were it to be privately owned? Thirdly, could he please explain what procedure for public consultation on such a brief takes place before he is required to determine the application?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Previously, as Assistant Minister and on Scrutiny, I was very much interested in housing issues along with other Members and approached the Housing Department to see to what extent the Green Street site, or at least part of it, could be used as an exemplar project to bring forward what I consider to be the possibility for true, affordable homes. Some discussion has taken place with the Housing Department. I believe that there have been briefs to a certain extent that have been written and indeed some architectural work has been undertaken, to see to what extent a regeneration project on that site could deliver benefits across the board. That said, I think the general point is that there is more than one site. There are many, many sites in States ownership that could be used for affordable homes and, indeed, that will be part of a presentation made to this House in order to test the assumptions as to whether or not the States are of a mind to use their own property in that particular case.

4.9 Deputy S. Power:

Could the Minister give the Assembly an assurance that in any application to reuse the Lesquende site at Quennevais, that he would encourage the Housing Department to seek a higher than indicated plot density ratio and particularly the number of habitable rooms per acre, which seems to have dropped from about 120 to something approaching 70? Would he have a view on this?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I certainly do have a view, and I agree with where the Deputy is coming from. Density is an issue that we have to get to grips with. It is not always the scare story or the bogeyman that a lot of people think. Indeed with the Lesquende development there are a number of residents who have approached me over the years as to the insufficiency of the houses that were built and operated under the Homes Trust. There are not enough rooms generally and there are better design methods to improve the site without having to build rabbit hutches or places which are not suitable for human habitation.