

2.3 Deputy J.H. Young of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the current status of the approved Masterplan for the development of the St. Helier Waterfront:

Will the Minister advise the Assembly of the current status of the approved Masterplan for the development of the St. Helier Waterfront and whether he has any plans to review it as a result of changed circumstances since the plan was adopted?

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

The Masterplan for the Esplanade Quarter was endorsed by the States in 2008 with a subsequent minor amendment being approved in March 2011. This, together with the Supplementary Planning Guidance adopted in 2006, provides the approved planning framework for the development of the St. Helier waterfront, as set out in the Island Plan at Policy BE2 which was approved by the States in June 2011. In considering whether to revise the planning framework for the waterfront, it is worth considering what the current framework seeks to deliver. The primary objectives of the current masterplan are as follows: To integrate St. Helier with the waterfront and address the separation caused by the road; to create a distinctive mixed use quarter and to make a step change in design quality; to create a new office quarter to serve the financial services industry and create new opportunities to broaden the tourism and visitor sector; to create new areas of open space for residents and visitors and to provide new homes for local residents. Within this framework provided by these objectives, the masterplan does offer some flexibility to respond to market changes and demand. It is relevant to note that despite the prevailing economic conditions, the process of implementation of this plan is underway as evidenced by the current planning application by the States to develop the first office block on the Esplanade Quarter. As with all planning guidance and policy, however, there is a need to ensure that it remains relevant, up to date and applicable. While I have no stated aim to review the plan at the present moment, I must remain open-minded to the need to do so, having regard to the needs and aspirations of the community and any changes in circumstances.

2.3.1 Deputy J.H. Young:

Would the Minister confirm that one of those needs of the community that he referred to in the objective includes the site for a new hospital? Would he confirm that that is a changed need and would he confirm that he is looking at it?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The Deputy is right that there is a process underway to look at potential sites for hospital relocation and it might well be that the waterfront is considered in that respect. That said, if it was to be the case, then that might well give rise to alternative considerations which would have to be added in to the current masterplan. When the current masterplan was considered, no consideration of hospitals or, indeed, police stations or anything else was put in as an objective.

2.3.2 Deputy S. Power of St. Brelade:

Could the Minister assure the Assembly that any individual or, indeed, piecemeal application to be considered under the waterfront masterplan does not compromise the overall waterfront masterplan as was approved that the Minister referred to, and that this is subsumed by the Island Plan 2011 and that any amendment to the waterfront masterplan must come before the Assembly?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The Deputy is right that the consideration of the masterplan is a whole package which is made up of the parts that were outlined. Indeed, if a piecemeal application is to be forwarded that does not necessarily comply with those aims, then that may well be a material consideration for the planning process.

2.3.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of St. Saviour:

Would the Minister not confirm that the apparent efforts being put into the Waterfront Masterplan have ensured that the promise made at the time of the Island Plan debate that there would be a masterplan on Five Oaks, that this has now been put at the bottom of the agenda? Would he confirm that this is what is not happening?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

No, indeed. In the process of providing masterplans for any of the suggested areas that were highlighted within the Island Plan or indeed any others that come to light by parishioners or States Members in the intervening period, all such masterplans are to be treated with equal respect but this has to be done within the context of the staff that I have to undertake these functions within the department. In some respects, the new Budget process has provided my department with some extra monies which will facilitate the raising of the status perhaps - as has been asked for by Deputy Le Hérissier - to the level that he would have the assurance that it was going to be done sooner rather than later.

2.3.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

But what is the date for the submission of that plan?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The date is probably going to be set to some months after we start and we have not started as yet.
[Laughter]

2.3.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Would the Minister agree that the existing masterplan is not viable in the current financial climate and that the only thing which made it viable was the £98 million bond and that without the bond, the whole project, as previously envisaged, stands to make a £50 million loss?

[10:00]

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I think the interpretation that is being placed by the Senator might well have some justification and certainly, if that is the case, it might well be a material consideration as I mentioned earlier.

2.3.6 Deputy J.H. Young:

Would the Minister accept that one of the changes that his review, when it takes place, should take into account is the doubt of the demand for new office space for the finance industry, the availability of competitive arrangements and the problems with vacant office space elsewhere in St. Helier? Will he confirm that those things will be taken into account in his review?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I certainly will and I think the Assembly must be reminded of the fact that at the present time there are some outstanding applications for building office space of some 850 square feet, which is well in excess of the office accommodation that is probably required for the finance industry or for other industries.