

2.9 Deputy M. Tadier of the Chief Minister regarding ...

Will the Chief Minister inform Members whether Jersey will be participating in the Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge which aims to protect outdoor recreational spaces in communities all across the United Kingdom as a permanent living legacy to mark Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee? If so, when will the public be able to nominate and vote on playing fields in line with the Fields Challenge criteria?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

The Diamond Jubilee Committee is working hard to identify a potential site to recommend for Queen Elizabeth II Fields status. It is the State's responsibility to nominate a site, given the need to meet the Fields in Trust's criteria, but the public will be asked to share its support by an internet vote once nominated. The cricket pitch and rugby field at Granville School is one proposal put forward by the Minister for Education Sport and Culture. There are, however, legal issues that need to be addressed before any firm decision is made and it would therefore be too early for me to comment about this site's suitability.

2.9.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Will the Chief Minister comment on the fact that this initiative until very recently certainly for myself, and I would say the majority of the public, has remained very secretive. Could he confirm that this initiative is a very valuable one to mark the auspicious occasion of Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee, that it should be for the public to vote initially and to propose which fields they want to be protected rather than having a committee, which I am sure the Chief Minister will also inform us of its composition? This will present a pre-selected and no doubt very narrow selection of choice for the public then to rubber stamp.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

You are asking so many questions at once and the difficulty is that the person required to answer forgets where to start and which question to answer. I shall endeavour to pick up the answers. Firstly, this scheme is not secretive and has not been secretive in any way, shape or form and yes, I do support it and will support Jersey having either a field which meets the criteria of this status or perhaps, because of some of the legal issues with regard to a United Kingdom Trust, we may even go one step further and have a local Queen Elizabeth II field status area. As I understand the criteria, which are required to be met, it must be, if I speak in U.K. parlance, the local authority which therefore means it is either the Government of Jersey or the committee. I believe that is absolutely right and proper but there will be the ability for members of the public to show their support if we are able to come forward with a site that meets those criteria. I believe that the membership of the Diamond Jubilee Committee is already in the public domain.

2.9.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

I thank the Minister. The reason there were so many questions is there is so little information out there for other States Members and the public. If I am permitted to do so, I would like to quote from the Duke of Cambridge who is promoting this particular initiative. In the spirit of the initiative he says that: "1,000 playing fields have been lost to development and many more are under threat." That is why they intend to try and save 2012 playing fields across Great Britain. Does the Chief Minister accept that to have a group composed of States Members who are probably various Ministers who have earmarked different areas for development for housing, for new schools perhaps at Les Quennevais and St. Martin are completely conflicted when it comes to deciding which fields they should be protecting. In fact, it should be the public who have a say on protecting fields rather than Ministers who may not want to select fields which are already being earmarked for development. That is a complete contradiction against the spirit of this initiative. If the Chief Minister will imagine an impartial and informed observer looking at this, would he not agree that is completely unacceptable and the public should be able to choose which fields initially should be selected for this challenge?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I could not disagree more. I do not believe that there is a conflict of interest as the Member might be aware. The Bailiff and His Excellency also sit on the Diamond Jubilee Committee and I do not believe they can even be considered to be conflicted in the way the Member suggests. If he, or any other Member or members of the public or constituents have approached Members with suggestions for areas that they wish to be considered and reviewed against the criteria for this status, then I would ask either the Member to contact me directly or the individual member of our community to contact me and I will put those before the committee for consideration along the criteria that these fields will be required to meet.

2.9.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I do not know where the suggestion comes from that the Bailiff or any of those cased should be impartial. There was no inference of that. Simply, as far as politicians are concerned, they are the ones who definitely have a direct and perceived conflict among the public. Will the Chief Minister perhaps consider making a press release asking the public for their nomination for fields that should be saved? Also, so that the public can make an informed decision, will he inform the public if there are any plans at any level to develop fields for schools like at Les Quennevais, St. Martin and any others so that the public can say they do not want these fields developed? They want them to be protected one way or the other so that there cannot be any accusations of machinations going on behind the scenes.

[10:45]

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy makes many good points in his final supplementary question. It was probably also remiss of me not to specifically invite the Connétables to bring forward suggestions that they might have of potential fields in their Parishes that they may wish to be considered alongside the criteria. I will take all the points that the Deputy has just raised. There is due to be a meeting of the committee, as I understand it, later this week. I will make them to the committee but I see no problem with such a press release and with the opening, which the Deputy suggests has not been the case in the past. There is no intention in any way, shape or form for this scheme to be shrouded in mystery and I am a little surprised to think the Deputy thinks that, but we need to correct it if that is the case.