

3.14 Deputy J.H. Young of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding alternative uses for redundant historic buildings:

Will the Minister inform the Assembly of the alternative uses for redundant historic buildings, particularly redundant churches, which he prefers and encourages when applying the historic buildings policies of the Island Plan 2011 and advise whether he considers these policies to be sufficiently flexible to ensure viable use of such buildings, and if not, will he be making appropriate amendments?

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

It is not for the Minister to express preference for any type of use to which a redundant historic building might be put, but rather to assess whether proposals put forward by applicants are acceptable and appropriate, having regard to the Island Plan policies approved by this Assembly and the international conventions that the Island has signed up to, committing it to safeguarding its architectural heritage. I consider that both the Planning Law and the Island Plan policies provide me with sufficient flexibility to deal with proposals that affect historic buildings, to ensure that viable uses for important old buildings can be found. I do not consider that the Island Plan policies require amendment at this present time.

3.14.1 Deputy J.H. Young

Could the Minister clarify his answer, please, on what he means by: “viable uses for important old buildings”? Does he not consider that residential use of such premises is an appropriate use?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I do consider that residential use is or could represent a viable use, but there too are a host of other viable uses to which important historical buildings could be put to.

3.14.2 The Connétable of St. John:

At a Scrutiny hearing last week, I put the question to the Minister in response to the Island chapel. In response, he said he had met trustees of the chapel regarding its possible use but he did not enlarge on what he had told them. Since then I have heard in the media that he is supposed to have said that the chapel could be used for a theme pub or theme park type venue. Could the Minister confirm or otherwise that that is exactly what he did say, please?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

That was among the advice that was given to the representation that I met onsite, and in doing so I was referring to a practice that is undertaken by the Methodist circuit in the U.K. It should be known to Methodists in Jersey and indeed to all Islanders that around 100 Methodist central halls were built in major towns and cities across Britain between 1886 and 1945. Of those, only 16 halls are still being used by Methodist churches as churches in their original form. Others have either been demolished or converted into themed pubs or converted into other forms of places for entertainment with the agreement of the Methodist movement. It was in that context that a potential alternative use was suggested. In addition, a letter was written to the circuit suggesting that alternative potential types of use for the church could be considered and that included class A, shop; class B, food and drink premises; class C, office uses; class E, warehouse; class F, accommodation, which includes residential; class G, social purposes; class H, leisure, with the exception of swimming baths, or class I, entertainment.

3.14.3 Deputy J.H. Young:

Would the Minister not consider that members of the public listening to his answers would consider such explanations entirely woolly, ambiguous and without providing sufficient clarity for the trustees of these church buildings and does he not think that they need guidance and advice rather than sort of an academic treaty on why it might be possible in such buildings?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

No, I think the public, certainly with the further explanations, would not think that. I have to make the point that the latest offering of a Methodist central hall to the entertainment industry has secured an investment of £1.8 million in Bodmin by the company JD Wetherspoons. I think it is very clear that if we are trying to achieve a betterment of these buildings or indeed a future use, then these things should be considered, but in considering them, I think they must be considered across the board. I have not stated that this is the only acceptable use. I have highlighted all the other uses within the planning laws that would find a suitable or sympathetic Minister in considerations that are put forward to use the building for further purposes.