

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

4.1 Deputy J.H. Young:

As we have had a recent change of heart from the Ministerial Steering Group on the publication of the short-listed sites for the hospital, could the Minister confirm that indeed sites in the St. Helier waterfront are in fact on consideration for the site for the new hospital?

[12:00]

If so, how does he square that with the proposal to consider the planning application this week for the States of Jersey offices on the Esplanade site?

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

This is really a question for the Minister for Health. If she wishes to divulge the consideration of the short-listed sites for hospital relocation, it is up to her. I am not in a position to do her work for her.

4.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Can the Minister advise who is leading and who is on their new review panel, looking into traffic issues around the proposed site of the police station or Green Street Car Park and Green Street roundabout?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

From the department just recently, in a quick email, the suggestion is that the Department is working with T.T.S. to look at the parking requirements, not exclusively for the police station, but parking requirements specifically for the north of town area, and to determine whether or not any particular large developments might have knock-on effects elsewhere. As for the makeup of the group, I am advised that it is officers from the Environment Department and also officers from the T.T.S. Department and a number of consultants.

4.2.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Minister for Planning has to decide this Friday on the future of the Green Street Car Park site. Will he be doing this without the findings of this new review panel?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

That depends. I am not privy to divulge whether or not that information will be available to me at the meeting as yet, or not. Certainly it is one of the things that I must take into consideration when assessing the police station application, and if indeed specific questions remain unanswered because work is yet to be done, then the obvious thing is that there will be a call for that work to be undertaken.

4.3 The Deputy of St. Mary:

As it now appears that we have joined up thinking between the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Planning, would the Minister be able to indicate when he envisages commencement with building the new category of affordable housing?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Indeed, there are a number of applications that are in the pipeline, not least of which is the application for Girls' College, which, according to the Supplementary Planning Guidance, indicates that the preferred use for that site is for affordable units of accommodation. If indeed there has been a change of heart as to the long term use of that site, and not to put it on the market necessarily for first-time buyer units for open sale at high prices, then indeed I think an application could be considered to start building on that particular site in a very short timeframe. There are also other sites that are being discussed, and I would have thought that if we do have a

coming together and a convergence of the thinking processes from the Minister for Environment and indeed the Minister for Housing, then progress can be a lot faster than it has been in the past.

4.4 The Connétable of St. Helier:

This States Assembly has spent considerable time developing and amending the North of Town Masterplan proposals and expectations of the public were raised considerably. What is the Minister doing to bring the private land owners back to the table in order that this masterplan can be pursued vigorously?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

What this Minister is doing, is he is able to finalise the planning guidance note for the particular site in question, with or without the support of the owner of the site. I think once the final document is seen by the owners of the site, there will be support for it. That said, in relation to my earlier remarks about the extent of the Minister for Planning and Environment's powers to force people to build things that they do not necessarily wish to build, in strained economic times at the pace that they would not wish to build them in is incredibly difficult. If indeed the House would like to give me those powers I am pretty sure that I could bring people to the table a lot faster.

4.4.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Is the Minister optimistic that in the lifetime of this Council of Ministers, we will see some positive news from the north of town master plan, particularly in relation to the Le Masurier site?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Personally I am confident, but you should never count your chickens.

4.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

What progress has the Minister made with encouraging architects and builders to adopt new building methods with the attendant reduction in costs?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

In the last decisions that have been undertaken by the Minister, there have been extra provisions that I have put on to the positive approvals, to encourage the uptake of sustainable building technology in as many areas as I am able to do it. The wider one is about moving the industry generally into the provision of modular building techniques, in particular those that do have much of the buildings constructed in European factories, is slightly longer aim. There are a number of private applications that are coming forward though, which is very encouraging. When the news gets out of the affordability of those units and indeed the speed at which the buildings can now be erected, I think the larger building companies will be chomping at the bit and biting my arm off to do the same.

4.6 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Is the Minister aware of any moves within his Council of Minister's colleagues to approach the owner of the Plémont site with a renewed offer of private and public money to purchase the site and basically reopen the Plémont debate? Has any pressure been put on him to change his mind on this?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

That is a question that I would rather not answer.

4.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

If option B is adopted as the model from 2014 will the Minister give an undertaking to only allow new developments in those districts which are over-represented, in an attempt to give greater voter equity to the Island for those Parishes which will be over-populated?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Now there is a thought.

4.8 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

With the ongoing problem and delay around solving the asbestos problem, the Minister's Environment Director recently said it was proving tricky to get all the right people together for the visit to Bordeaux, where asbestos recycling specialist Initum runs its operation. How much of a priority does the Minister place on the asbestos problem, and are his views filtering down to his officers to get a move on and to address this important problem?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I certainly think and would hope that my officers are fully on board. The difficulties have arisen, so to speak, in getting departmental officers from and across 2 departments to work together. Personally it should not be as much of a problem as perhaps is being suggested, and I am hopeful that the date that has been given to me, which was 16th April, has not been met because of other prior commitments from T.T.S. officers. I am told that another date is being sorted out for shortly afterwards and the visit will take place in early May.

4.9 The Deputy of St. Ouen

Could the Minister inform this Assembly whether he or his department have been consulted over the future of the Fort Regent swimming pool or other areas in the vicinity, and if so, in what form?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I think at the moment we have more than one group that is looking at the long term proposals for the Fort Regent area, and indeed, my officers in the longer term, planning part of the department, are conducting a proper masterplan review of the area, which as I said, takes into account the Fort Regent group. I am aware that another group that is being undertaken by the Property Holdings Department, under the auspices of the Minister for Treasury and Resources and the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources. Hopefully both parties will speak to each other at some stage and the importance of the longer term benefits that can be brought to the area will come to the fore.

4.10 Deputy S. Pinel of St. Clement:

Can the Minister give the Assembly an update on future proposals for Samarés Nursery?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Not exactly at this point in time. It has been suggested at the Council of Ministers meeting in asking me to review the situation for H3. The proposals that were being put forward by my department and myself, were deemed to be unacceptable at this point in time. Consequently there has been a request of my department and myself to come forward with a slightly different review or different mechanism in order to achieve the housing needs. Part and parcel of that review is perhaps to suggest that there should be a revision of the sites that were specifically excluded as H3 sites in the Island Plan, and to reconsider those, perhaps with rezoning proposals, or making exhibits, to ensure that if indeed this House, in agreeing those sites, are coming forward to be useful for residential accommodation. But the residential accommodation would only be built or only allowed if it were deemed to be properly affordable, and able to be treated and conveyed in that state in perpetuity.

4.11 Deputy J.A. Martin:

In the report from the States of Jersey Development Company, referring to J.C.G. (Jersey College for Girls): “The significant adaptation to the listed building and the redevelopment will only be realised if necessary flexibility is provided to achieve an economically viable and sellable scheme.” Can the Minister confirm that, because it is the States of Jersey Development Company, they will not get any preferential treatment to the listed buildings?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I did publish in my planning guidance note that this Minister’s preference was to use that site in line with the thinking of the Assembly for the provision of affordable homes. The application - that is before me at the moment, so I cannot go into it in too great detail - is perhaps suggesting that the amount of affordable units that are to be put on that site is not necessarily the greatest number that that site could accommodate. There are negotiations and discussions taking place, and the head of S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company) is down to visit me next week, I think it is, or perhaps the week after.

4.12 The Deputy of St. Martin

Given the Minister’s personal commitment to recycling, how does he justify the high level of costs to local companies for the various permits and licences required to undertake this work?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I think the Deputy would have to tell me a little bit more as to which permits he is talking about. Generally, I do not govern necessarily the permits, there is planning permits for overall use of particular sites. Indeed, a lot of the further charges that may or may not take place are subject to a different ministerial control.

4.13 Deputy J.H. Young:

Since the Minister declined to reply to my earlier questions, not his responsibility, would he accept that it is his responsibility under the law to ensure that land is used in the best use of the community, and the matter of whether or not the waterfront is one of the few suitable sites for a new hospital, is a matter that does rest with his responsibility and one is entitled to ask him to tell us?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

I think the long term strategic use of any piece of land is absolutely vital. I do accept that it is an area of responsibility and remit that I am interested in and I should take into account. That said, the ordinary planning process does not necessarily at all times give me the opportunity to wade in and to suggest that, just because the Minister for the Environment thinks it should be used for A and it must only be used for A. If planning applications are made which are covered adequately by the rules and regulations which come under the planning laws, I am legally and duty bound to consider those on those planning merits and terms.

[12:15]

4.14 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister confirm that he is committed to Island wide kerbside recycling? If so, what has been the hold up, up until now, in achieving a system of Island wide kerbside recycling?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

In a nutshell the Island decided to invest over £100 million of capital monies into an incinerator which needs to be fed. There is a difference of opinion as to the economic worth or value of burning materials which could otherwise be recycled, for example, the 7,000 tonnes of plastics that we do commit because of their high energy value for burning. They are based on oils, so obviously they do have a high calorific value. We would suggest that perhaps if a recycling price, in excess of the burning price, could be achieved, then one would go down the recycling

route. There comes a point that in the running of an incinerator or any Energy from Waste plant, that if the materials that are conveyed to that facility are not of a sufficiently high burnable quality, then indeed, the burning of other fuels might well have to be considered, or alternatives of allowing imports of materials from Guernsey or further afield would have to be contemplated, to run the machine according to its design, capacity and use.